

Merry Christmas

Phyllis Van Setters

YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

TUCKAWAY HOUSE

BY
CHARLOTTE BREWSTER JORDAN




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TO THE
FATHER AND MOTHER
WHOSE COURAGE AND STEADYING
LOVE MADE POSSIBLE THE HIGH
HOPES AND HAPPY MEMORIES OF
THE HAPPY-GO-LUCKIES
IN
TUCKAWAY HOUSE



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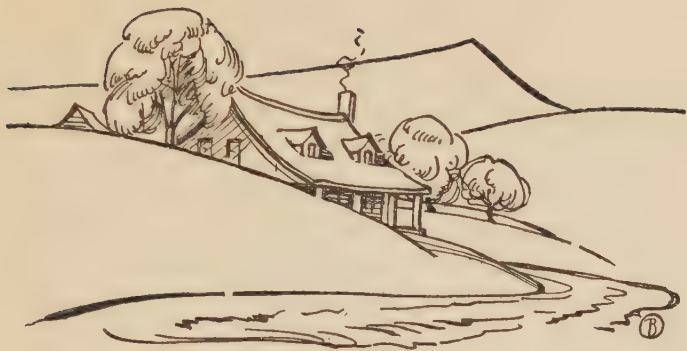
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TUCKAWAY HOUSE

“In the old house where we grew
From childhood up, the days were dreams,
The summers had unwonted gleams,
The sun a warmer radiance threw
Upon the stair.”



TUCKAWAY HOUSE

CHAPTER I

JOURNEY'S END

TUCKAWAY HOUSE was tiny, and sometimes it was topsy-turvy, too. But what else could one expect of a small house into which were tucked seven lively little girls besides Father and Mother?

To William Walter—the boy next door who was scrouched down in a crotch of the blossoming cherry tree in order that, unseen, he might watch their arrival—it looked as though there were seventy youngsters instead of seven.

“Whoa! Whoa!” called the man that was driving the big covered wagon up to the gate. “Whoa! Whoa there!” piped many voices inside. And when the horses got it into their heads that their

big load was somehow to be tucked into this little white-and-green house, asleep in the late spring sunshine, they came to a standstill.

Before they had really stopped, however, things and animals and folks began tumbling out of the wagon. First Doris, the oldest of the Deane children, a dreamy-looking girl of thirteen who held out her arms for one of the twin babies. It seemed as though she had been holding a baby in those loving little arms all her life, and it wouldn't be natural if she hadn't some darling wee sister always cuddled close up to her. Then the next oldest, curly-haired Shirley with the saucy smile, suddenly popped out and snatched up the remaining twin.

"Be careful now, Shirley," warned Mother, a plump, rosy little lady with the kindest of faces. Mrs. Deane had such a knack of comforting other people's trouble and such a way of taking to her warm heart any one in distress, that Father said he was sure that she must be the original shock-absorber. The name fitted her exactly! For the mother of the seven Deanelets just had to spring right up again after every little family jar, and so keep things running smoothly in this happy-go-lucky household.

And Father? He was a dear, too, who always had such real fun with his children! You will hear all about him in the following chapters; but

just now he is too busy getting everything out of the moving-wagon before dark catches him, to give us his attention.

After helping Mother down, he lifted out the three remaining children. That makes seven, doesn't it? Count them now on your fingers: Doris with one twin, and Shirley with the other. That's four. Then Madge tugging poor old Brownie-dog, who had never been on a leash before, so kept winding them both around trees and gateposts. Chubby little Polly came next carrying her pet black kitten, Lady Teaser. And last of all appeared curly-haired Elizabeth dragging along the family dolls bound together in a shawl strap. Fortunately, they were mere wrecks of dolls, entirely used to the loving bumps and thumps by which their little mistresses had brought them up, and down; so they didn't mind being now dragged all over the grounds of their new home.

"Is this all the livestock?" asked Father as he swung up on his shoulder Elizabeth, called "Whizzie" or "Lisbeth" for short, and peered into the dark wagon. "I should say not! Here's one of the most important members of the household!" And he quickly set a chair so that Dicey, the old colored cook, could clamber down. This crotchety old woman had been in the family ever since Mother was born.

"Just think of that!" gasped Madge in an awe-stricken voice the day that she found out this valuable piece of information. "Dicey used to be Mother's *mammy*!!!" And the little Deanes tried vainly to figure out her impossible age. Finally they gave it up, content to accept Madge's suggestion. "Well, anyway, she must have lived in the days when they worshipped idols, before Methus-alum. Don't let's fuss any more about it!"

With Dicey came a countless number of shapeless bundles tied up in red bandannas and squares of purple calico. Under one arm was an enormous bandbox and under the other a slatted crate, from which some ugly, red-necked ducks were stretching inquiring heads. The old cook always kept a brood of them near the kitchen door, and woe betide the little Deane who thought to get any fun out of teasing these quacking question marks!

Dicey always wore purple calico. She had grizzled white hair, and her tall, straight figure and commanding voice proclaimed that she was a power in the family. All of the children now escorted her to the cosy, two-roomed cabin opening out of the kitchen. For here was to be Dicey's home, handy to the big cook room where she was going to live with her old cat, Calamity, now mewling pitifully in the great bandbox.

"Now, you-all clar out of here while I stirs



ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

up a good pone of cornbread for you after yore all-day ride." And she poked a stick of wood into the stove and glared into the oven. "Clar out now," as the children lingered, looking curiously around the new quarters, "every mother's son of you! I brung the bell along with me, and when you hear it, all you youngwuns come a-running. For you-all's gwine to eat in Dicey's kitchen to-night till Miss Doris and Marse Jawge git yore new home red up for you."

"Marse Jawge" was Mr. Deane, of course. "Miss Doris" was the old cook's name for Mrs. Deane whom, as you know, she had nursed from babyhood. When little Doris was born and named for her mother, everyone was wondering how they were going to know which Doris was meant. Then Father began calling his new little baby, "D. D." (Doris Deane) and after that, the child was Dee Dee to everybody.

"Go on, Dee Dee," urged Dicey. "Take the hull raft outer here"; and she shoed them toward the kitchen door. "You jest naturally trail round and splore yore new home, honeys, till you hear me ding-donging the bell."

So out they all flocked, happy and excited at the prospect of finding new treasures and new good times tucked away in this new home that had just come into Father's possession.

Father's great-grandfather had built the house,

and when Father was a little chap, many a country lark he had had there. Since then, the old place had been lived in by many members of Grandfather's family. Then it had been rented to a tenant who had treated it very badly, letting it run down, spending nothing on it, but getting out of it all that he could. After he left, the old house had stood empty and neglected for many years; and the blackberry bushes that Great-grandpa had proudly planted in front of the house had grown up into tall canes and become a hiding place for tramps and bad characters generally.

Finally, an old uncle had recently bequeathed the abandoned farm to Father. And with the news that the shabby old homestead was his to fix up and live in if he wished, came also an offer of his uncle's position as cashier in the bank of Sharon, a bustling little town but half a mile away. Father and Mother had talked it all over and finally decided to move here, for six months at least; for they knew that it would be ever so much better for their seven Deanelets to get out of the hot, noisy city and revel in the good country air. The new home was said to be furnished, so most of the battered city stuff had been sold, and only such essentials were brought with them as could be tucked into the big wagon in which they had been jogging along ever since sun-up.

Such fun as it had been, gypsyng all day long

—eating their meals by the roadside, running behind the wagon to stretch their cramped little legs, finding new flowers, and brooks and ghostly gray moss and plushy green moss with fairy red-cups in it, and all sorts of lovely surprisey things growing along the way—so that not one of the high-spirited little wayfarers realized how tired she was. All the world seemed to be dancing with life for their special benefit.

And now here they were at last! All this was to be theirs! And six months seemed to stretch a long time ahead. They would not miss any city playfellows because, never having been allowed to play in the crowded city streets, they were used to making up their own games and enjoying them all together under Dicey's supervision. Here was the big, cobwebby barn to play in, and here was a locked corn crib filled with mysterious things, and on the south porch was a kennel for Brownie. What fun they had filling it with clean hay from the barn loft, so that their tawny play-fellow might have a comfortable first night in her new home!

Then there was the next-door pig, a great fat white one, grunting howdy-do from her pen close to their fence. Mrs. O'Swilliken, Dee Dee named her; but the children called her Nora, for short, as they scratched her back with long sticks.

The mouse-colored cow under the cherry tree

gazed at them with big, gentle eyes and gave them a friendly "moo"; but as the little Deanes were not yet used to horns, they kept at a safe distance from her.

A few golden daffodils were sunning themselves near the house, making Dee Dee and Shirley think of the gardens they were going to have; and the grass was thick with violets.

"I never thought I *could* get tired of picking flowers, but I am," Madge finally admitted, tossing her violets away. "Let's go over across the road and see how our new home looks from that side! We'll all go through the turnstile at the end of the yard. Won't that be fun!"

So, one by one, they slipped through the stile, and over they trailed to gaze in admiration at the little house by the roadside in which they were to have so many jollifications.

"I never lived in a story-and-a-half house before," exclaimed Shirley, unceremoniously dumping her twin on the ground so that her arms might rest a minute. "But I must say it looks nice to me! Mother said we five oldest are going to sleep in that big room that covers 'most all upstairs, and I can see where we're going to have some great bedtime parties."

"I like the outside of it," said Dee Dee wistfully as she shifted her twin to the other arm. "Some-

how it looks so comfy, so long and low, and—motherly,” she added hesitatingly.

“Mother isn’t long and low,” teased Shirley.

“And just look at the little pileth of thnow,” lisped Elizabeth, tossing back her curls as she pointed to the petal drift on the pathway, “and at that big flower tree!” Then plumping herself down on her bundle of dolls, she added admiringly, “It lookth juth like a gianth big bouquet!”

“But it’s a cherry tree, and it’s growing on the wrong side of our fence,” objected chunky little Polly, holding her ear close to Lady Teaser so as to hear the contented song she was purring. “I——”

“What difference which side it grows
If ripe, red fruit falls on our toes?”

interrupted Shirley, the family rhymester.

“If cherries big drop close to me,
Then what care I where be the tree?
If——”

But just then a bell sounded, and Shirley’s jingle came to a sudden end. Snatching up her twin, she hastily joined the procession trooping back to Tuckaway House: Big sister, little sister,



*Doris with
Prue*

*Shirley with
Sue*



*Madge with
Brownie*

*Polly with
Lady Teaser*

Elizabeth

THE SEVEN DEANELETS

middle-sized and twins, Brownie barking furiously, and Lady Teaser miauowing and struggling to squirm out of Polly's strong arms—a weary, happy septette, all laughing and chattering at once.

As they disappeared into Dicey's domain, a stocky, disgruntled lad climbed stiffly down from his cherry-tree lookout, grumbling to himself as he slammed the door of the neighboring house, "Not a blame' boy in the whole menagerie!"

CHAPTER II

THE CROSSWAYS BED

WHILE five of the little Deanes were happily devouring Dicey's johnnycake in the kitchen, Mother was putting the tiny twins into impromptu cribs made of chairs set against the wall, and Father was distractedly scurrying around trying to find a sleeping place for the others.

When notified that he had inherited Tuckaway House, Mr. Deane had been told that his uncle had left him a home plainly but fully furnished, and so, remembering the solid comfort of his boyhood visits, he had brought only such things as could be easily transported from the city home and had sent word for the place to be cleaned and put in readiness for them.

Now he was looking about him in consternation. Where were the big old secretary, the Heppelwhite highboy, the rolled-arm sofas, the Windsor chairs, the pie-crust tables, the stately wardrobes? Not a trace of them! There was a kitchen fully equipped, also a big drop-leaf table and a few

commonplace chairs that might serve for the dining room, but nothing at all in the second story except some old trunks, an immense four-poster bed, some empty chests, a dilapidated bureau, and two or three cots which could not possibly be made to hold five people.

"Never mind, Father!" said Mrs. Deane. "You and I can take the two cots for our room downstairs, and to-morrow you can unpack the cribs for the twins. And for to-night—well—we'll just have to put the other five into this enormous maple bed."

"It seems strong enough," and Mr. Deane tested the great bed cord, "but even so, it can never be made to hold five."

"Oh, yes, it can, if they lie crosswise! Now, pull off the feather bed and the corn-husk mattress, and while you are beating and shaking them at the big back windows, I'll wipe off the frame again and get out the bedding and nighties. Fortunately, they won't need many covers such a mild night as this!"

"The more I think about it," said Mr. Deane as he dexterously swung the great husk mattress on to the bed cord and smoothed out the billowy goose-feather bed, "the more I believe that Hulse, the tenant, must have sold the original furniture to some wandering second-hand dealers. Antiques like those would have brought good prices. Prob-

ably they only left this leviathan because they couldn't get it apart. The condition of the uneven, sagging floors downstairs makes me suspect that his tobacco crop must have been piled in all the first-floor rooms except the kitchen with the chamber above, where the family probably lived. I am specially sorry on your account, Doris dear; for, besides the comfort of those old pieces, I know you would have shared my pride in the quaint heirlooms—— But, here comes the quintette!"

Sure enough! Laughing and singing, the five trooped up the stairway and looked around with delight at the great sweep of the attic room.

"Oh, what a lovely big room, with four windows, back and front, too! . . . What fun we're all going to have up here! . . . And what a wonderful, pillowy bed! . . . Who-all's going to sleep in it? . . . Where's the bed for the rest of us?"

"To-night we are going to put all of you, cross-wise, into this four-poster bed," laughed Mother. "Do you think that you can manage it?"

"Oh, of course we can! . . . Oh, goody, goody! . . . What luck to sleep the first night in a crossways bed! . . . Put Dee Dee in the middle so she can tell us a good-night story!" they all clamored at once.

"Dee Dee may sleep in the middle if she wants to, but no stories to-night," said Mother firmly.

"She is too tired, and so are the rest of you. Besides, you have all lived through such lovely stories all day long, you have only to think of them, and listen to the rain that is beginning to fall on the roof, as you go off to sleep."

"Come now," said Father. "Choose your hooks for your clothes. Form in line. The first one in her nightie will be the first one thrown into the crossways bed. One, two, three, *go!*"

This family team work in dressing and undressing had been devised by Father to prevent little girls from dawdling, mislaying stockings, garters, and pinafores, or calling for help just when the helpers were busiest. So he had taught them to stand, after shoes and stockings were dealt with, one in front of the other—the "clothes line," he called it—so that each could fasten or unfasten the waists, underbodies, dresses, or aprons of the one ahead, while she was being unbuttoned or buttoned up behind. To-night, each child's garments were rapidly stripped off and hung on her special hook with stockings laid across the shoes below. In the morning, the process would be reversed, and the nightgowns hung on the hooks.

When the five little white-gowned figures had said their prayers at their mother's knee, Father gave them one of his special treats. Picking up little Elizabeth, he swung her gently back and forth while the others joined him in chanting,

“One to make ready,
And two to prepare,
And three to go slapdash
Right down—*there!*”

As her sisters' voices shrilled out *there*, down went Elizabeth into the billowy bed. Soon, another, with a scream of delight, was beside her, and then another and another, until all five had been plumped into place.

“Now, don't talk,” said Mother, as she kissed them good-night, “but go right to sleep, for to-morrow has some lovely things to show you about your new home.”

Turning obediently on their right sides, five little folk drew up their knees, putting the bend into the crook of the hollow in front of each, throwing an arm over the next sister and cuddling up close to her warm body; so that by the time Father and Mother had reached the foot of the stairs, they had all slipped “spoon-fashion” into the Land of Nod.

CHAPTER III

SETTLING IN

POLLY was the first to wake in the cross-ways bed the following morning. As she lay there, sandwiched in between two deliciously warm little bodies, she reviewed every detail in the great adventure of journeying from the city home to the beckoning joys of Tuckaway House. While staring at the rafters overhead, she heard voices outside.

Sliding quietly out of bed, she ran to a side window and watched with interest a hay wagon coming down the road. As it was passing the next-door house, an odd-looking woman stuck her head out of an upper window and yelled, "Drive in the lane, I want to buy some hay!"

"But I was just going to put this load into my own barn," protested the farmer, slowing down his horses.

"Well, why not put it in mine and save yourself the trouble of carrying it any farther?"

"I don't like her face," whispered Shirley, who had joined Polly at the window. "She looks as if

—as if—she was always going round trying to smell her own nose.”

The lane was so very rough and narrow that the farmer had great difficulty in driving the team up to the side porch where the woman was waiting for him. As the horses finally struggled up to it, she announced, “I want you to leave me enough hay for three hens’ nests!”

“*For three hens’ nests!*” roared the farmer. “I’d dump it all in the road first!”

My! but Farmer Jones was angry!

“And I don’t blame him,” said Madge who had joined the interested group. “Enough for three hens’ nests, indeed! She must be crazy!”

Meanwhile, the farmer was getting wrathier and wrathier, for he had discovered that the lane ended at the barn, and was too narrow for him to turn the big hayrack around or even back out. So finally he had to unhitch the horses and lead them to the road, and then push the wagon out.

A fifteen-year-old boy had come out of the house to help the farmer but, although he pushed and tugged with all his might, he got nothing but scoldings and rough words for his pains.

“What queer people to be living in such a pretty old house!” said Madge. “Those three great trees in front look like big, upside-down feather dusters and are just like the ones in our picture of the home of the Three Bears. That outlandish

old woman is certainly one bear, and the boy looks cross enough to be another, and that big, tied-up sheep dog would do for the third. I'm just going to call it 'The House of the Three Bears'!" . . .

"Clothes line!" came a quick, pleasant voice from the foot of the stairs.

Then what a scampering and scurrying for shoes and stockings! Everyone wanted to get in line as quickly as possible this first morning in Tuckaway House. Father or Mother would be up in a few moments to button up the one at the end of the line, and superintend the finishing touches of face washing and hair combing. It was all over in a surprisingly short time, and seven happy little Deanes were soon sitting around the breakfast table.

Dicey had had the bright idea of setting the table on the side porch, and the family were so delighted to be near the blossoming trees and singing birds that they voted to eat every meal out there.

"It won't be any more steps for Dicey," pleaded Madge, "because it's so contagious to the pantry."

A shout of laughter greeted the little girl's misused word; for Madge had a way of flying after words too high for her and sometimes flopping down on the woodpile. But she didn't mind being laughed at, and was generally too heedless to stop and master the correct pronunciation of the

new expressions that she was always picking up, or coining, as she ran.

"If we turn one end of the porch into a dining room," suggested Father, "I don't see any reason why we can't turn the old dining room into your playroom. Suppose you all get busy now, and as Mother unpacks your things, put them away in their new places. Just see what a fine playroom you can show me when I come home from the bank to-night."

"What a lovely bare room to fix up!" and Shirley pirouetted blithely around the playroom-to-be. "It's lots better than having to poke things into places that are already there!"

"But we can't put them into nothing!" demurred practical Polly. "Let's hold a council!"

So five little folk put their heads together, and finally laid this plan before Mother:

"We'd like, Mother dear, to put boxes all around the sides of the room, so that they would make shelves. There are plenty of little box crates in the old carriage house left over, I guess, from packing things they used to send away. They are small, but that is all the better, for we can pile them one on top of the other. Please say that we can use them!"

"Well, you may try them, anyway," assented Mother.

"All right! and don't come in, please, till we've

got them all arranged," said Polly who loved to introduce big words into her conversation, "for we'll have to experiment a good many times before we achieve just the right way."

After an hour or two of hard work, they had things most compactly arranged—artistically arranged, too.

Two small boxes, one on top of the other, with their open sides to the room, were put under the windows to hold the pictures and playthings of the youngest, who could thus get out and put back their treasures easily. The other boxes were placed all around the wall, facing the center, so that the bottoms of the boxes, standing on their sides, formed shelves, much as we arrange sectional bookcases nowadays.

In certain places, as between windows or doors, a box with a lid was centered on top. These were to hold some of the unsightly but very necessary equipment of a playroom. Jugs of flowers were placed on top of some of the cases, and little sets of books in plain iron book ends were stood on others. Although far from rich in this world's goods, books were the Deane treasure trove. Dolls, when new and daintily dressed, appealed for their novelty, but their unchangingness caused them soon to be cast aside in favor of the story books of endless surprise and charm. Mr. and Mrs. Deane, anxious to keep their children off

the city streets, had supplied books without number, and had cultivated a love for them, too, that was often a safety valve for childish restlessness. Even Madge, notorious for the way in which she slid out of having anything to do with school books, was an excellent and eager reader, eating story books alive and reading and rereading them tirelessly to others.

So certain shelf groups were chosen by lot to hold those most often read—The Dotty Dimple books, the Elsie books, the Bessie books, "Sanford and Merton," "Tom Brown's Schooldays," the beginnings of the Alcott series, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "The Schönberg Cotta Family" and "The Swiss Family Robinson," Hawthorne's "Wonder Book," "Robinson Crusoe," Cooper's "Leatherstocking Tales," and, of course, "Alice the Adventurous."

Doris and Shirley had more than story books. Doris had a set of Dickens, and some really choice volumes in her case, the kind the true book lover cherishes; and Father saw to it that her collection increased in value all the time. Shirley had a set of Scott, and her love of verse was leading her to collect and pore over the best poetry that had been written; so she, too, spent many an absorbing hour with her favorite authors.

Some of their best-loved, unframed pictures were retrimmed and tacked to the wall; and when

the little chairs were scattered around, the room began to look quite presentable.

"But no room is any kind of a playroom if it hasn't a work table where we can paste and draw and cut out our paper dolls," protested Madge.

"I know how to make one," said Polly slowly; for she had been pondering over this same thing. "I know how we can do it with five boxes—just like this." And picking up a pencil she drew roughly a practical table. "See? The boxes must all be the same size. Put one on end in the middle, so—and one on end close to each side of it with the opening out, so we can put our knees inside when we sit up close. It will be the shape of a cross—just like this."

"Fine!" cried Madge a few minutes later. "Now let's call Mother in to see what she says."

"I really think it is the nicest playroom you ever had," approved Mother. "It's practical and it is pretty. You have plenty of room to play games, you can easily keep your treasures in order, and all your books look bright and homelike on their section shelves. Polly's home-made table is splendid, so useful and comfortable! And I will give you two linen scarfs to cross each other on it, so their ends can hang down and cover the open sides when not in use. Dicey and I were just putting up the cretonne curtains in the living room, and I am sure there will be enough left over

to hang at the playroom windows, too. Everything looks so attractive that I shouldn't wonder if Father would paint your table and bookcases for you!"

"Oh, goody! I wish he'd let us paint them ourselves!"

"Maybe he will. Were there any more cases left in the carriage house?"

"Yes, lots."

"Well, then, who wants to convert them into bookshelves for Father's and my books? All of you? Very well, see if you can fit them each side of the mantelpiece in the living room. Run them to the ceiling, if you have enough. But eat your lunch first. I've just had mine."

Waiting for them on the porch table were five little bowls and spoons, a plate of bread, and a pitcher of milk.

"Pooh!" said Shirley disdainfully. "This lunch isn't worth saying grace for! I think Dicey might have cooked us something hot in the middle of the day when we always have to have this for supper, anyhow!"

"She's been working extremely hard, assisting Mother," protested Polly primly. "Mother asked us always to sing grace, you know, when Father isn't home to ask it."

"Well, then, I'm going to change it to suit," insisted Shirley cantankerously. "Instead of,

“For daily bread, our Father,
We lift our thanks to Thee,

let's sing it this way:

“For bread and milk forever,
We lift our thanks to Thee,
We——”

“Doan't you-all go to meddling with Bible hymns, now!” Dicey felt privileged to reprove Miss Doris's children as she had their mother before them. “‘Daily bread’ you knows well enough means whatever you got to eat without going into partiklars. You's turrible nimble-witted, Shirley, but doan't you forgit that Nimble Wits sometimes runs precious close to Smart Alecs.”

“Oh, don't let's fuss!” pleaded Madge. “Don't you remember how Mother told us to make a game of any unpleasant thing we have to do? I've thought of a splendid game, so's we'll all get the old bread and milk down before we know it! Now, my bowl of milk is Columbus, and I'm the West Indies, and my spoon is the little caravel that will bring Columbus to me. Polly's bcwl is our old home, the spoon is the moving-wagon, and Polly is this new home. Do you catch on?”

“Yes, I see,” and Shirley's ill-humor vanished.

"Mine'll be Leander swimming the Hellespont. And Whizzie's can be Red Riding Hood taking a basket to her grandmother, and Doris can be George Washington crossing the Delaware to Trenton, and——"

"Now, wait, let's all do it together; one, two, three, *go!*"

"Good for you, Madgie!" And Dicey beamed on the empty bowls. "By the looks o' them clared-up dishes, it's bound to be a clar day to-morrow, sure! It's just as the Good Book says: 'To them as learns to take life's hardships as a game, to them shall happiness be long in the land.'"

"Now we've got to get a lot of boxes to rig up shelves for Father's and Mother's books. I must say I'm getting tired of lugging any more boxes to-day," yawned Shirley.

"Pooh! that's nothing," cried Madge, the untiring. "Don't you remember what Mother told us the Indians do? When they're getting tired on a long march, they just pick up a heavy stone and carry it a while, and then, when they put it down, they're rested. Let's clear away these dishes and race around the house a few times, and I bet we'll think it's fun to lug in boxes—especially if we play we're a caravan crossing the desert. Come on!"

While Doris and Shirley and Madge arranged

the boxes in place, Polly interested Whizzie in helping her to make a pair of original tabourets. Bringing in two big round cheese boxes, thrown out in the wood shed, she showed her little sister how to stick clothes pins all around their edge.

"There!" turning the old cheese box with its novel decoration upside down. "Now the clothes pins are legs, holding up the box as a little table! Perhaps Father will let me stain these, too!"

"I'm sure he will," smiled Mother. "They are going to be as handy as they are ornamental."

By the next evening, the living room of Tuckaway House had begun to assume a very attractive look of hominess.

"Just give Miss Doris a few rags o' carpet and four or five sticks o' furniture," chuckled Dicey, "and in two flicks of a fox's tail, she'll make a room look like she'd lived thar all her life."

And so Father thought when he came home from the bank. Dicey had produced from an upstairs closet some strips of rag carpet that she had carefully washed, dried, and spread before the hearth where, on the quaint Hessian andirons, was a fire of old apple boughs—the first that the children had ever seen—that was sending forth dancing flames, spark whirlings, whimpering sounds, and sweet odors. Father's sleepy-hollow chair and Mother's desk and walnut rocker had been

taken out of their wrappings, and a folding table had been opened and covered with a gay cloth, books, and magazines.

One of the great chests had been brought down and covered with another gay blanket. It held the wood and made a hearthside seat for the children, too.

The flowered cretonne curtains from the old home were hung each side of the windows, and their cheery colors vied with those of the book bindings on the homemade shelves flanking the hearth from floor to ceiling.

"I can hardly wait for Father to get home to ask him to let me stain those boxes so that they will look like really-truly walnut bookcases," said Doris bringing in candlesticks from the kitchen shelf and placing them on the mantel each side of the quaint old church-steeple clock. "And, Shirley, you've done the best of all."

Shirley's contribution was the stone jars that she had brought up from the cellar, filled with branches of wild crab-apple bloom, and stood on the floor each side of the fireplace.

Heaped on the chest were cushions, in bright-colored, washable covers, that the children were to be allowed to sit on before the fire, provided that they remembered to put them back afterward.

A few old portraits that Mrs. Deane had carried everywhere with her, from her Southern

home, added here their touch of dignity. Father had managed to bring home with him two or three big wicker chairs which, with their cushions, gave the room a substantial charm and removed the last trace of any just-moved-in appearance.

"Oh!" exclaimed Madge. "This is just the loveliest, camp-outiest place I ever saw!"

"That's just what it is!" assented Father. "Our summer camp where we'll try to be comfortable for six months, and then, on Christmas Day, we'll take a vote as to whether to make Tuckaway House our real home or go back to the city to live."

"I choose to stay here forever!" said Madge promptly. "Tuckaway House has the good home-feel to me."

"Not so fast, Madge! You have hardly been here a day. Much hard work is ahead of us, and cold weather, too. Let's light up now!" And putting a match to the row of candlesticks, he gazed proudly around the homelike room and at the eager, wistful children.

"It looks fine enough for a party!" they cried.

"All right," assented Father, "why not have a house-warming in the form of a family birthday party for Dee Dee?"

"Sure enough!" chimed in Mother. "Dee Dee will be fourteen to-morrow, and the Birthday Child, you know, always chooses the supper."

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTHDAY CHILD

THE Deane children always thought Sunday the nicest day in the week because Father was home then and took them on long, rambling walks in the afternoon, and afterward read "Pilgrim's Progress" to them—paraphrasing it, as he read, into a softened edition of that gruesome book. To-day promised to be especially interesting because it was the first Sunday in Tuckaway House; and besides, it was Dee Dee's birthday.

On birthdays, every meal had its touch of novelty; for the Birthday Child was allowed to choose the dessert for dinner and some little treat to be added to the usual bread-and-milk supper around the fireplace. Breakfast, too, was made specially festive by the presentation of the family's gifts accompanied by nonsense rhymes.

At first, Father held the office of Rhymer Extraordinary to the Birthday Queen; but of late, he had let his mantle fall upon Shirley, who had developed such an insatiable propensity for jingling meter that her father had dubbed her the

Rhymester Laureate. Not only did her thoughts run to rhythmic measure, but everything she did, every step she took, subconsciously adjusted itself to her tingling sense of cadence. Though constantly breaking out into jingles, there was an occasional flash of real poetic feeling in some of Shirley's metrical effusions that made Mother hopeful that this second daughter might in time find expression in worth-while verse.

This morning Shirley had the family lined up and primed with couplets as Father escorted the Birthday Child to the seat of honor. First, Mother dropped a little box into her lap with,

"If Dee Dee will sing,
I'll give her this ring."

As Doris was delightedly examining the little gold circlet that her mother had worn as a child, and trying it on admiringly, Father slipped a silver piece into her hand, whispering,

"And if she'll not holler,
I'll give her this dollar."

With a squeal of joy the Birthday Child changed the money into her left hand and held out her right to Shirley, who advanced with an elegant bow, saying,

"And if she'll not budge,
I'll present her with fudge!"

She had hardly backed away when Madge and Polly rushed up with,

“And if she’ll not look,
We’ll give her this book.”

“Oh, but I *must* look!” exclaimed Doris who loved books more than all the book-loving family put together.

“Look away, then,” agreed Shirley. “I just said that because I couldn’t think of any other rhyme for ‘book.’ ”

“‘Little Men’! Oh, won’t that be nice to put next to the two volumes of ‘Little Women’ I got on my last birthday!”

And then Elizabeth sidled up bashfully with,

“And I’ll give her thith hanky
And pleath to thay thanku.”

“Of course I’ll say ‘thanky’! Thanks to everybody! I think I’ve had a perfectly lovely birthday!”

“But that isn’t quite all, Dee Dee. Call the twins.” And Father put down on the floor, Prue and Sue who were just learning to creep. At Dee Dee’s call, they came crawling rapidly toward her, each with a dandelion in her chubby fist.

“Oh, the darlings!” And Dee Dee caught them up eagerly. “Did you bring a birthday

flower to your own Dee Dee? See, she'll wear them right here." And with a flower hanging over each ear, she lifted up the twins, put them in their high chairs, and settled herself with the rest at the breakfast table.

But even there, a surprise awaited her. On her plate was the biggest egg, decorated by Dicey with a scrapbook picture, underneath which was scrawled, in Polly's handwriting:

I done laid this special for Dee Dee.

MOTHER SPECKLE.

After the merry breakfast came the family scramble to get into their "Sunday-go-to-meetings," for Mr. Deane was going to take the five oldest to church.

Polly's dress was always a new one. The others generally suffered from the process dubbed, "reduction descending"—that is, they wore hand-down dresses which, thanks to their ever-busy chain-stitch machine, were skilfully made over to fit the next youngest or smallest. But no apparel ever got beyond Madge. She demolished all clothing so thoroughly that it was always necessary to begin over with Polly. To-day each child was resplendent in a starched white lawn dress trimmed with crimped ruffles, and a wide, bright-colored sash.

The hair dressing was Mrs. Deane's special task, and often a very difficult one, because each child's requirements were so different. Doris was letting grow the straight hair that she had always worn short. And, to get it out of her eyes, Mother made two little braids each side of the front part, turned them under, and tied them with prim little bows of pink ribbon that were very becoming to her. Her pleasure in them was generally spoiled, however, by Shirley's calling them "beau-catchers" or "shoo-flies."

Shirley, dancing on springs, could hardly keep still long enough to let Mother brush over her finger her ten coppery curls. When wet, they hung each side of her thin, freckled face like brown sausages; but they soon rippled down in becoming ringlets that were the despair of the straight-haired members of the family.

Madge's locks were still short and stubbornly straight, and refused to look respectable in any of the many ways Mother tried to arrange them. To-day she wet them thoroughly and tried to train them back with a round comb. But, oh, dear! The stiff ends stood up behind the teeth as if receiving an electric shock. But as Madge was always either giving or receiving electric shocks, the effect was rather in keeping with her character.

"Don't take your hat off in church, dear," cau-

tioned Mother, "and perhaps we can train this obstinate fringe down as it grows."

Polly's thick wavy hair was drawn back and arranged in the heavy braid that was her secret pride, and tied with a splashing bow of ribbon matching her sash.

And Lisbeth's fair, curly locks that looked, when wet, like a cluster of yellow candles, soon dried out into most fascinating golden ringlets.

Father was very proud of his beribboned, be-muslined, spick-span band of five, as he escorted them to the family front pew that was to be their weekly niche in the quaint country Meeting House Elizabeth, as usual, snuggled right up to Father's heart and went sound asleep. The other four enjoyed the novelty of it all—exploring the first square pew that they had ever seen, getting acquainted with the methods of the kindly-looking old minister, listening to the lively strains proceeding from the new organ in the gallery in the back of the church, and speculating about the other children in their "Sunday-go-to-meetings," who might some day become their friends and playfellows.

The afternoon tramp in the brimming, sun-bathed world proved more than usually interesting because they were frequently exploring places where Father had played when a boy, and were constantly finding new flowers on the river bank.

Here, too, they first met cat-tail and calamus, eating with relish the tender green shoots of the sweet flag and nibbling cautiously at its nipping roots. The fresh green of the trees and the bluest of blue skies flashed back by the stream made enchanting pictures such as they had so far seen only in frames. They were specially curious about the logs lying near the shore over which some boys and girls were leaping, springing from one to the other before they could sink.

"Oh, can't we try that, Father?"

"Not to-day. But some day, soon, I'll bring you and let you enjoy the fun when there are not so many here."

"I choose it for my birthday next month, then," said Madge. "If I choose that lark for my desert, we can all enjoy it together."

"Very well," agreed Father, "but now we must go home because I have a special story to read to you to-day."

When they were all settled around "the eye of the room," the leaping log fire that took the chill off the late spring evenings, Mr. Deane drew a paper from his pocket, turned to the Children's Page, smoothed it out on his knee with a great deal of flourish, and said:

"Here is a little fairy story by a rising young

author that I thought I would read as a birthday special, and leave 'Pilgrim's Progress' until next Sunday. It is called 'The Enchanted Balloon.' "

As he read it, Mother noted with amusement the shifting play of interest, excitement, bewilderment, and enlightenment on the faces of the listeners. Doris heard the title with a start, listened attentively for a moment, flushed, and looked more and more downcast. Madge straightened up like a flash, her hair fairly bristling above the back of her comb. Shirley grinned at Mother and looked teasingly at Doris. And as the gist of the story slowly filtered into Polly's painstaking mind, she opened her mouth wide in amazement. That was a little way she had, and deeply resented it when Shirley, trying to break her of the habit, often popped her finger into the open mouth and called her "Fly catcher!" All of them were sitting on the edges of their chairs and could hardly keep polite silence till Father had read the last word.

Then they all broke loose at once:

"That's the story Dee Dee told us last year, and we liked it so much we made her tell it again and again, and last night in the crossways bed! . . . Oh, goody, goody! . . . Dee Dee's in the paper! . . . She's a really-truly author! . . . Hooray for you, Dee Dee!"

"Yes," laughed Father, "she's a 'really-truly'

author. When I heard her repeating the story to you a third time, I jotted it down, much pleased with its originality and nice use of scene and phrase. For I had noted a few weeks before that the *Hearth and Home* was offering to print good stories written by children, and as I knew that Dee Dee would be too modest to think of sending anything herself, I sent in 'The Enchanted Balloon' without consulting her."

"But, Father," pleaded Doris quite overcome, "I could have done ever so much better than that, if you had only told me."

"Perhaps so, perhaps not!" Mr. Deane gave her an encouraging pat. "It couldn't have been so very bad, or the editors wouldn't have accepted it. So you're a real live author, you see."

"Oh-h-h!" and Madge exhaled a long-drawn-out sigh. "I always did want to see a real live story author! And now we've got it right in the family."

"So did I," and Shirley grinned at her mother. "I always wanted to ask a real, live author to make the chapters extra long, so that when bedtime comes and I say, 'Oh, Mother, *please* just let me finish this chapter,' the chapter'll be so everlasting long, I'll sit up that much later."

"There's another author in the family," and Mrs. Deane smiled proudly at her husband.

"Oh, has Father a story in the paper, too?"

"Not in the paper, but here's my first little book of Indian legends."

"Oh, goody, goody! . . . Two live authors! . . . But I suppose it's too grown-up to interest *us*, isn't it?"

"There's something on the first page that might interest Dee Dee. I am going to give it to her as a birthday extra."

"I'm so *proud* of it, Father. I just can't tell you!" The tears started in the sensitive child's eyes. Then, as she read the inscription, they quite got the best of her while giving Father a good hug. It said on the fly-leaf:

To Doris the Second
with the hope that her stories, too, may soon
find their way into book covers.

As dusk was glooming to darkness, Mother said: "Now for the supper! Dee Dee chose to have supper *à la* Heidi to-night, and as it proved very easy to get on such short notice, we are going to try it."

"There's a boy looking in the window," Madge suddenly exclaimed. "Horrid thing! It's the boy next door! He's always listening or peeping at us!"

"Oh, ask him in, do!" said Mother. "I'm sure he would enjoy our Heidi supper, too." But

when Father went to the door and called him, there was no boy to be seen.

"I choose to be the Alm-Uncle!" announced Madge. "Don't you remember how it says in my Heidi book, 'The old man put a large piece of cheese on a long iron fork, and held it over the fire, turning it to and fro, till it was golden-brown on both sides'? Ah, it sounds so good, it always makes my mouth water to read it!"

"Madge is always so choosey!" objected Shirley.

Madge flashed her a jubilant look. "Well, if I'm quick enough to think of it first, why *shouldn't* I choose?" she challenged. "It's free for all, isn't it? Even Dicey says 'There's nothing lost by having a spry tongue in your head.' "

"Father must be the Alm-Uncle to-night," Mrs. Deane decided. "See, Dicey has provided two slices of cheese for each of you, and an extra one for the Birthday Child."

"Yes, and I remember," said Shirley springing over to the black tin tray on which were set a great glass pitcher of milk and seven tall goblets, "that Heidi was always drinking 'bowls of rich, foamy milk.' We can't have bowls, but I can make the milk foam, even if it isn't goat's milk!" And she began rapidly pouring the liquid back and forth in the glasses with the grace of a soda-fountain artist.

"Oh, just smell that browning cheese! . . . I'm so hungry!" Five eager pairs of eyes watched Father turning the fork on whose prongs several golden slabs were impaled.

"Each get your soda crackers from Dicey's hot plate! There, now, Mother first, and then Dee Dee."

"Oh, isn't it dee-licious?" And chubby Polly, who had what Dicey called a "lickerish tooth," bit off a big and luscious morsel. "I wish we could all have four chunks apiece!"

"Not so close to bedtime," Father said. "Besides, you want to leave room for Dicey's birthday treat. Here it comes now!"

And in came the family stand-by with the pierced-silver cake basket that had belonged to Mrs. Deane's grandmother, heaped high with oatmeal wafers, so rough, so brown, so crumby, and so nut-like that all crunched them with zest. The old cook always shared the family feasts, as well as its joys and sorrows.

"Thank you so much, Dicey!" cried Doris. "I don't believe anybody else in the world can stir up such goodies as you! How would you like to have us celebrate your next birthday?"

"Well," said the gratified old cook, "now we're back in God's country agin, I'd plumb like to have agin what I ain't had sence I left Dixie—that is, a regular bonfire birthday party."

"Oh, that will be lots of fun!" chorused the children. "How old are you, Dicey?"

"I dunno. All I knows is I want it in August when the corn's ripe, so we can stick the corncobs on the end of fishin' poles, and bacon on the ends of twigs, and cook 'em right in the fire. And I'll bake a corn pone in the ashes. And I'll make befo'hand one o' my brown sugar pies that's always so lickin' good."

"All right, Dicey," agreed Mrs. Deane. "We'll save all our old packing barrels and brush and clean-up wood so's to give you a royal, roaring birthday bonfire."

Much pleased, Dicey sank into her special chair by the door, ready to listen to the good-night sing that always closed the Sunday evenings.

Elizabeth generally appropriated the place on Father's lap, listening delightedly to what she called "Daddy's bumble-beeing voice"—a very sweet bass—and chanting with him the repeat in the lower notes while the rest held the higher ones. Each of the children was allowed to choose a song; and as the Moody and Sankey hymns were very popular just then, Madge always indulged in such action songs as "Pull for the Shore" or "Let the Lower Lights Be Burning." Mother started the hymns, and all joined in with a will. Shirley had a flute-like voice, and the rest sang with great vim. Even Dicey pronounced the

words in a minor singsong that did not jar, though strangely free from the tune.

"Dicey isn't really singing at all, is she, Motherree?" whispered Madge.

"Sh-sh!" warned Mother. "She enjoys it so, and you mustn't hurt her feelings."

"All right, I see! She's just doing what the Bible calls 'making a joyful noise unto the Lord,' isn't she, Motherree?"

After the children's choice had been given, Mr. and Mrs. Deane generally sang, to please Dicey, some plantation or Jubilee song with rolling sweep or vivid, wistful appeal, such as, "Steal Away, Steal Away," "Little David, Play on Yo' Harp," or "Oh, Boys, Carry Me Long."

Last of all, with unaffected earnestness, they all sang standing, "God be with You till We Meet again," and then started up to bed.

Doris waited a minute after the others had gone to say:

"It's been just the nicest birthday I ever had! I never can thank you enough! Our Father and Mother *do* make us have such happy birthdays!"

"We are very proud of our little daughter!" they answered, kissing her good-night. "We hope that she will have many happy returns of this happy day."

CHAPTER V

HO, FOR THE GARDEN!

AS SOON as the house was comfortably livable, the Deane energy centered upon making the yard presentable.

The thicket of tall blackberry canes that had, through many years of neglect, grown nearly as high as the house-top, had been grubbed out, and the ground leveled and seeded. This not only improved the Deane yard but gave a charming outlook upon the place opposite, which the children named "Well Sweep," because of its quaint well with bucket attached to a long pole.

Incidentally, the removal of the blackberry underbrush had enlarged the outlook of the invalid girl who was spending the summer at "Well Sweep" with her grandfather, Doctor Ward. This kindly absent-minded professor and examiner used to wheel Louise out on the lawn early in the day and then—after a brisk constitutional with shoulders stooped, hands behind back and head often lowered in thought—he would retire for the morning to his study. There he would bury himself in his manuscripts which

were later to appear as a famous book on Comparative Theologies. And Louise would have been lonely indeed, in this isolated three-house settlement half a mile from Sharon, had not the disappearance of the overgrown bushes given her the opportunity of watching the lively Deanelets, who, all unconsciously, acted many a little play for her amusement.

She noticed, for instance, the excitement occasioned by Mr. Deane's arrival with the new lawn mower. With delight, the children watched the uneven grass fall before its triumphant advance, as each begged for the favor of trundling the clattering cutter.

Letting out the privilege of having his lawn mowed by eager helpers—much as Tom Sawyer manipulated the concession of whitewashing Aunt Polly's fence—Mr. Deane next interested those awaiting their turn, in cleaning up the yard ahead of the rolling machine, in piling the cut grass in heaps, and in helping him to straighten the path to the front door. Energetically they pounded down the sharp-pointed pegs to which the aligning cords were attached, digging away ruthlessly at any growth that ventured to show itself outside the boundary strings.

"Fine!" said Mr. Deane, approving their handiwork. "Now that we have a stepping-stone path to our front door, we must dig out the old grind-

stone steps. Here's the edge of one sticking out from under the weeds!" Scraping away the rank growth, he finally unearthed three great circular stones. "There! Now the approach begins to look as it did a hundred years ago."

"How did they ever get here anything so heavy?"

"I have heard my father say that his grandfather hauled them in ox carts over the mountains. They were made in half-sections so that they could be handled. You can see where they were joined. As a boy I used to like to cut short the grass that would grow in this round opening in the center. Now we must put a knocker on the front door for the convenience of our guests."

"I saw one on the kitchen door!" exclaimed Madge.

"So did I! . . . So did I! . . . Me, too!" chorused the others.

"Yes, that is the original knocker. Hulse, the tenant who lived in the kitchen with his family, must have moved it back there for his own convenience. I'll unscrew it in a jiffy, and after Dicey polishes it for us, you can see the original cutting, 'George Deane, 1768.' In a few minutes I can put it back where my grandfather had it. Isn't it fun to make things look again as they did when I was a boy?"

"If you had some boys of your own now instead

of all them girls lazing around," cackled a strident voice, "you wouldn't have to work so hard yourself around the place."

Straightening up from his task, Father perceived the woman next door leaning over the fence. Removing his cap, he replied courteously:

"I wouldn't have it different, madam. My girls suit me exactly."

"She's a pestilential scourge, isn't she, Father?" whispered Polly, watching the woman as she slammed open her cellar doors.

"Don't you know the golden rule for neighbors, Pollykins? 'Unless you can say something good about them, forget them'! Now, you hold the screws for me while I put the knocker on!"

By supper time, the front yard was so trim that Father promised his helpers a special treat. Instead of going upstairs as usual for their bedtime frolic, the children were to be allowed to "sit up" and talk over the seed-planting plans. Because all their knowledge of the countryside had been drawn from books, all real outdoor life now aroused their keenest interest.

Father showed them some saucers filled with seeds of various sizes and shapes, some so tiny that a single one was no larger than the periods in their reading books.

"Those teeny-weeny ones can't amount to any-

thing," said Madge contemptuously. "I choose these big rough ones."

"Indeed, the very tiniest can amount to something," protested Father. "That tiny little dot knows that, if it is given a chance, it is bound to turn into a little white sweet alyssum flower. These seeds will turn into flaming red poppies, and those that Madge has chosen will be gay nasturtiums in orange and yellow."

"I should think they might make mistakes sometimes," and Polly examined them carefully. "This, for example, might start to be a Johnny-jump-up and find it was a buttercup, after all."

"No, the seeds never make mistakes. There are no accidents in God's plans. The tiniest sweet alyssum seed couldn't be a scarlet poppy if it tried! God, who makes the seeds, puts into each one the making of just what it is going to be, and a feeling as to just when to let the baby plant curled up inside split this little sheath skin, burst through it and send roots down into the ground. The only time they fail," added Mr. Deane impressively to the interested group, "the only time they fail is when *we* fail to give them what they need—water, good soil, no weeds to gobble the ground's strength and moisture. There is no sense in trying to have flowers at all unless we make up our minds to play fair with them. They always

play fair if you give them a chance. Don't you remember the story of the long-buried wheat? Dee Dee does. Dee Dee, you tell it to them briefly."

"Some years ago," began Dee Dee obligingly, "they found in Egypt the tomb of one of the early kings, called Pharaohs. When this particular Pharaoh died, he was buried with all his treasures—beautiful caskets inlaid with gold and ebony, jewels and flasks, golden throne chair and shrine. All these were put into the tomb with him, and as the centuries went by, the sands kept shifting over his burial ground till it completely covered his resting place. And, after a while, the great-grandchildren of those who had put the Pharaoh's mummy into the cave in the Valley of the Kings, forgot where he had been interred. Hundreds and hundreds of years passed by, and still the grave of the great king was not remembered.

"Then, one day, came a stranger from a far country, and got permission to dig around the valley where the dead monarchs were laid. With bands of native workmen, they dug and dug ('excavated,' they called it) till at last they found the old king's tomb with all its treasures. At once people began clamoring and squabbling for the scarabs and the curious and costly things that were unearthed; but the Government gathered them all

into glass cases in the museums where the world might come and look at the things that were made and used so many thousand years ago.

"After everything valuable had been taken to the museum, one of the workmen ordered to close up the hole said to the officer in charge, 'Might I be permitted to scoop up the grains of wheat that have fallen from one of the vessels and have been scattered on the floor?'

" 'If you care to take the trouble,' said the officer begrudgingly, 'but it is of no use since it has been hidden under here for nearly fifty centuries.'

"But the workman got down on his knees and scooped up a measureful and, being afraid that he would be laughed at if he planted it in Egypt, he sent it to his brother in a far-away country. And his brother who had rich lands, sowed the measure of wheat from Pharaoh's tomb, and then, four thousand years after the seed had been grown, it gave back to the world the secret life that it had been guarding all those ages, and sprang up into a wondrous, waving field of golden grain."

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed Shirley. "It reminds you somehow of people who wait so long for their chance, and do such wonderful things when they get it. I'd like to write a poem about it for Mother's birthday! To think that those grain seeds had to wait in the dark all those hundreds and hundreds of years before they got a

chance for people to be fair to them and let them show the world what God had put inside them to do in the right ground!"

"I shouldn't think any one would ever be unfair to flower seeds," said Polly thoughtfully. "I know I wouldn't!"

"Playing fair with them isn't so easy as you think," said Father. "When seeds are growing into plants, they need steady care. The weeds around them must be pulled up. If a drought comes, water must be carried to them. The earth must sometimes be loosened around their roots so that the rains and dews can get down to them. All this is work, pleasant work for those who love flowers enough, but it *is* work. Remember, you don't have to let these little seeds start to grow, but if you *do* put them into the ground so that they try to grow into flowers for you, you've got to do something for them and give them a fair chance to tell you the secret that God has put into each one of them."

"Why not," suggested Mother, who had joined the council just as Father finished speaking, "why not draw up a Garden Pledge for those who want plots and seeds?"

"Splendid idea!" agreed Father. "Each child may have ground properly prepared for a row of whatever kind of seed she may choose to plant. But one kind only, this year; for there is not time

now to prepare a regular flower bed. Those who play fair with their seeds this year will be entitled to a share in the big bed next year, *if* we stay. You may be looking over the packets and deciding which you would like to have, while Mother and I draw up the pledge."

"I believe I'll change to sunflowers," Madge reconsidered. "They grow so big, and the boy next door says chickens like the seeds."

"Goody! I'll take the nasturtiums, then," said Shirley. "I wanted them all the time."

"I *did* want a pansy patch," sighed Doris, "but I know it's too late now; so I'll try marigolds. They are so hardy, and look so gay and perky long after the others are killed by the frost. What do you choose, Polly?"

"Candytuft for me; it sounds so appetizing!"

"Everybody fixed but our Whizzabeth!" and Mr. Deane tossed her up to her pet place on his shoulder. "What does my little lady choose?"

"Thweet peath."

"Sorry, but it's too late. We always planted sweet peas on Saint Patrick's Day, March seventeenth, when I was a boy. Try again, sweetheart."

"I want to whithper it to you," said Elizabeth in a sudden fit of shyness, and putting her arms around her father's neck she whispered, "I want the tree that pop corn ballth growth on."

"Good for you, little Lisbeth! I'd forgotten

all about popcorn. Of course we must have it, and you shall plant a row. We'll have great fun popping it for Christmas. Perhaps you can pop some for the Christmas tree. Won't that be great? Now for the pledge."

"May we all sign it in ink?"

"Surely! No other way. Now think over each item that I read, so as to know exactly what you are signing."

GARDEN PLEDGE

I hereby agree to play fair with the seeds that are given me. I promise to give faithful, steady care to my plants, and to keep them well weeded.

If they need water, I will give them a drink every evening, but not when the sun is shining upon them.

I will also keep the ground loosened around their roots, will tie up those that need support, and will cut off all dead flowers and branches.

Signed.....

After this document had duly received the signatures, Father said:

"Now each one put her seeds to soak in a little water so as to hurry them along, for we are planting somewhat late in the season. To-morrow we will get up with the sun and plant them. Who wants to know what we are going to plant for Prue and Sue?"

"I! . . . Me! . . . Me! . . . I!"

"See that dead evergreen over there that looks like an old Christmas tree? We're going to cut

off all the lower branches, tie strings to the top ones, and run them slantwise down to the little sticks put in the ground all around the outer edge of the tree. Those strings will be for Creeping Jennies or wild cucumber vines to climb up. This will make a flowery little tent all their own for the twinnies to play in on hot summer days."

Madge clapped her hands. "Oh, I'm so pleased at that! It always used to make me just sick to see the skeletons of old Christmas trees carried off with their legs sticking out of the city ash carts!"

"Me, too!" agreed Shirley. "Don't you remember how Polly used to cry when we called it Christmas Tree Funeral Day? It always seemed a shame to cast off, when they are old and ugly, the things that had given us so much pleasure when they were fresh and lovely!"

"I am going to train the same plants another way," said Mother. "I notice that a great many are coming up around the kitchen window; so I am going to transplant some of them to the side porch and train them to climb over the big old spinning wheel that is now up in the shed chamber. When it is brought down to the porch and the vines are clambering over it, you will agree with me that it makes the quaintest, daintiest kind of a flower screen. There used to be one like it at my old home, and I can see still the upright white flower spikes marching over the top of the

wheel like a parade of fairy soldiers in the moonlight. The humming birds used to love it, too. I wonder who will hear the first little ruby-throat buzzing around the flowers!"

"I hope it will be me," cried Madge, giving her mother a good-night hug. "But, anyway, I think that we're going to have just the dearest little home in all the wide world!"

"I double-dare the rest of you to do what I'm going to do!" And beginning with the first little heap of grass, Shirley turned a succession of somersaults from one to the other till she reached the house. Not to be outdone, they all followed suit, heels over head, with more or less success; and, to the sound of Brownie's yapping applause, the lively lassies retired for the night.

Early next morning, a committee from the upstairs nightgown brigade came down to inquire if it was too early to plant the seeds.

"Not at all!" said Mother. "Father was out before sunrise, so hurry into your clothes and join him."

How perfectly glorious to be out in the radiant wind-swept morning! This sunrise occupation, which might have been very irksome to many, was an exciting adventure to little folks from a big city who had hardly dared to budge for fear of disturbing those in the small houses joined to their



“WHAT IS IT, WHIZZIE DEAR?”

home. There was no one to object now when they crept out into the half-wakened world filled with the fragrance of moist earth, wild roses, and dew-wet clover, and listened to the birds twittering in the ecstasy of living. The clean-swept freshness seemed to quicken their senses, making each morning so different; and they never could decide which kind they liked best—when everything was aglow and agleam in the dawn of a sunny day, or when the streamers of morning mist that had been veiling the valley were drifting away over the river. Madge thought she liked it best after a rain when there was so much exhilaration in the storm-washed air, and drooping branches, heavy with moisture, were turning rainbow-bright in the golden sun.

“It smells so dewy *sweet!*” she sniffed. “It makes me want to be clean and good, my own self.”

Doris loved best the sparkle of what she called the “dew beads” on the cobwebs—“diamond iridescence,” Polly called it.

“So do I like best the strings of cobweb beads! It brings me nearer to Fairyland than anything else!” confided Shirley. “I’ll turn it into a rhyme for you:

“The fairy webs the spiders spun last night,
The dew has strung with beads of sparkling light.”

Going out into the hushed garden just before daybreak one morning, Doris found Elizabeth lifting the flowering branches of the syringa bush and peering back of the swaying honeysuckle.

"What is it, Whizzie dear? Are you trying to find the little wren's nest?"

"No," and the child hung her head. Then cuddling up close to the much-loved older sister, she put her arms around her neck and whispered shyly: "I'm juth trying to find dear old God! I know He muth be round here thumwhere, for I feel tho happy!"

CHAPTER VI

THE TRIAL

WHEN Mrs. Deane had laid out the hair ribbons and sashes for the "Sunday-go-to-meetings," she had been amazed to find the Roman striped sash cut directly in two. As that first Sunday in the new home happened to be Doris's birthday she decided to keep all unpleasant matters in the background—temporarily, at least. So she quickly sewed the wide ribbon together, where the stripes joined and said nothing about it.

The fact must be faced, however; so, after a consultation with Mr. Deane, a family council was summoned immediately after breakfast on the Sunday following, and the matter laid before it. After stating the object of the meeting, Father asked for a frank confession, stating that a clean breast of it would save the culprit from punishment. The matter became more serious as five bewildered little faces steadily returned his gaze and no admission was forthcoming.

The children were then shown very plainly that the cutting could not have been done by any one

outside the family circle. Mother testified that she had put the sash away uncut a few days before, and that no outsider had had access to the bureau drawer in which the sashes and ribbons were kept. Since no child had pleaded guilty, the matter would have to be settled in some way before the family went to bed. After the usual hearthside sing, therefore, a formal trial would be held with Father as judge, and each child would be called upon to give testimony in the trial chair, swearing to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

It was a very sober group of children that gathered for this Sunday afternoon walk, and if it hadn't been for Madge's high spirits, the stroll would have been a very gloomy one. Shortly after their return, the three youngest of the quintette held a whispered consultation, and then made public the announcement that Lisbeth would confess at the trial.

Lisbeth! Of all the children! The dear little lamb! How had she ever managed to make so clean a cut along the stripes and then hide her naughtiness? Well, they would all help her the best they could. Her confession would undoubtedly lighten the strain of the dreaded, approaching trial.

After the half-hearted sing, Father transferred Prue and Sue to Mother's lap, took his place with

due solemnity as judge, announced that Mother and Dicey had been impaneled as jury, and arranged a large chair as witness stand. These awesome preparations filled the watchers with strange uneasiness. The sash ribbon, ripped apart, hung accusingly over the table placed before the judge, and the court solemnly awaited the confession.

Soon Polly and Madge returned with Elizabeth who, at the last minute, undisturbed by the fact that her fate was hanging in the balance, had asked for a drink of water. Ushering her with a flourish back to the waiting chair, Madge announced triumphantly, "Now, Father, Whizzie has come to confess."

Looking very tenderly at the little curly head, the judge said, "And so, Elizabeth, you have come to confess?"

"Yeth," and the curly head drooped a little, the candid eyes becoming downcast as she realized that nine pairs of eyes were being eagerly focused upon her.

Holding up the bisected sash, the judge said with reluctant sternness, "You have come to confess about the cutting of this?"

"Yeth, I have come to confeth"; then, smiling confidingly into her father's face, she added placidly, "I have come to confeth, Daddy dear—that I—I—didn't—*do* it."

Making a strange, chuckling noise, Dicey scuttled quickly out to the kitchen, and Mother suddenly kissed the twins on the backs of their necks, burying her face in their soft curls.

With difficulty the judge controlled his twitching face. "Since Elizabeth has made her confession," he announced gravely, "we should now know who the guilty one is. The court is, therefore, adjourned, and you will all go quietly up to bed without talking."

As the last of the bedtime procession disappeared up the stairs, Mr. Deane looked at his wife with twinkling eyes, yet with dismay on his countenance as he said:

"The dear little innocent scapegoat! She evidently didn't know what 'confess' meant, and when they told her that she must confess, and so take the blame off them, she obligingly agreed to do it."

"The guilty ones evidently thought that if *she* confessed, everything would immediately be forgiven and forgotten." Mrs. Deane sighed. "It is plain enough that it must have been either Madge or Polly, possibly both. If so, they are suffering enough now, worrying over the scrape into which they have put themselves."

"I don't believe that Polly had anything to do with the cutting, but her devotion to Madge may have led her to try to shield her. No, Madge is

the culprit. She has cut the sash impulsively to fit some of the theatrical games that she is always staging; then, assailed by one of those spells of fear that seem so strange in such a reckless, dashing spirit, she has tried one desperate way after another to hide it. She will probably come to us to-morrow morning and tell us all about it."

"We shall have to forbid her wearing her own sash this summer, I suppose." Mother shrank from a punishment that would make the little sinner so conspicuous. "If it had been just the cutting, done impetuously, it might, perhaps, have been overlooked. But denial and, worse still, maneuvering to have the blame laid on an innocent person, is too serious to be passed over. If——"

But the sentence was never finished. The stair door swung open, and a little nightgowned figure ran across the room, sprang on to Mother's lap, and buried its face on her shoulder.

You know what happened then. I need only tell you that when, ten minutes later, a repentant but much happier Madge stole softly back up the stairs, Mother said smilingly to Father, "The trial didn't work out so badly after all, did it?"

CHAPTER VII

NEIGHBORING

SO MUCH had the Deanes been engrossed in making presentable and comfortable both the inside and outside of Tuckaway House that they had had little time to take much interest in their neighbors; and they were quite unconscious that their neighbors, each in their own way, were taking a lively interest in them. In fact, they had but two real neighbors, those next door living in the House of the Three Bears, and those over the way in the place with the old-fashioned well sweep that gave it its name. These two places, with Tuckaway House, formed a little cluster of homes, half a mile from Sharon and farther still from any of their farmer neighbors.

It was natural, therefore, that the activities on a place that had been so long unoccupied as Tuckaway House had been, should awaken neighborly curiosity. Old Doctor Ward and his granddaughter across the road found infinite amusement in the antics of the Deanelets, and they rejoiced, too, in seeing the long-neglected homestead regaining its old aspect of thrifty attractiveness.

"Not that our own place is so spick-spandy, Grandpa, but the big lawn and shrubbery here are very charming for any one who lives out-of-doors as I have to, and I just love it."

"Well, the old shell has stood us pretty well, hasn't it, Louise?" The tall silver-haired professor straightened up his stooped shoulders and looked around contentedly. "I don't know of any other place where I could have had the quiet for concentration on my book that my library overlooking the river gives me here. That alone is worth the song I paid for the entire place. The only thing that has worried me has been your loneliness with nobody to talk to but your robins, and Mrs. Mudge in the kitchen, and that kind boy overstreet who comes to wheel your chair about every day."

"Well, Grandpa," laughed Louise, "I'm never going to be lonely again now that those seven lively youngsters have come. I feel now as though I had a box seat for an ever-changing play that goes on from dawn till dark every day in the week. I think those two nice-looking older girls must be somewhat near my own age, though I can see that they may be a few years younger."

"Is that so!" The absent-minded old professor looked greatly relieved. "If they prove really congenial to you, in spite of the difference in years, I might, perhaps, carry out a plan that I have had

more or less on my mind for several years past."

"Oh, Grandpa, what is it? Do tell me! It will give me something new to think about when I'm alone out here."

"Well, you know, of course, that in July we are going to Philadelphia to consult Marvin, the big surgeon, and I believe that there we are going to find the answer to our many prayers for you. If he can cure your lameness completely, as his letters lead me to believe, you will naturally wish to take your place again among those of your own age; so I had thought that this would probably be our last year here. But"—and the old gentleman hesitated—"if you *could* be happy here in summer with companionable neighbors, we might make this our regular summer home, and your friends could visit you in Hartley in the winter."

"That would be fine, Grandpa, but you overlook one important thing. I don't believe this tumbledown old house is going to stand up for you much longer. It looks picturesque enough outside, but—as you know—it often threatens to fall in on us."

"Yes, that's just what I was coming to, little mind-reader," and Doctor Ward looked fondly at his patient, crippled grandchild. "I will confess that I have often felt most uneasy about having brought my valuable reference books down

here in the summer. Many of them could never be duplicated. But—if I could manage it—I'd like, from the proceeds of my book, to tear this place down next spring, and build a fireproof library with a comfortable little house around it. What would you think of that?"

"I think it's a dream that is going to come true, Grandpa! I know it would be lovely to live out here in this good country air, six months in the year! But, while you are building, why not build an all-the-year-around house, so that, if we ever wanted to, we could spend an occasional winter here?"

"That's what I should like to do if I could see any permanent friendships ahead for you. The newcomers look promising to me. There's no finer man in the state than George Deane. I've known him from boyhood, when he used to go to my old church; and I happen to know, too, what a struggle he has had with illness following the ruin of his business by the Civil War. I have never met his wife, but I remember hearing that he married a Southern belle as lovely in character as in face. Her people, too—a fine old family—were ruined by the war. Dear! dear! dear! How queerly things happen in this world!" Then, suddenly coming out of his reverie, "Here comes one of them now!" And the nervous old gentleman beat a hurried retreat.

"Be sure to tell them all," he flung back over his shoulder, "that I must never be disturbed—in the daytime, anyway—not till my researches are all completed and my book is in press."

The caller proved to be Madge, who was a grand hand at visiting, especially if she wished to get away from any unpleasantness that seemed to be hovering in the air. She presented Louise with a great bunch of lilacs, omitting to mention that, a few minutes before, she had presented the same bunch as a propitiatory offering to her crabbed next-door neighbor. When told to "clear out and not clutter up the place with flower trash," Madge had promptly and thriftily transferred them to her neighbor across the way.

"Ever since we moved here," she said plumping herself down on the doorstep and fanning herself with a lilac branch, "I've been wanting to come over and watch your peacock. It makes me so creepy to hear him hollering so harshly for rain! What's his name?"

"Lord James!"

"Oh, I don't wonder he steps so proud and finicky! If I had even one feather with all that blue and green and gold in it, I'd be so proud! And I couldn't walk stuck-up enough if I had a whole fan of them!" Then, remembering her manners, she said, "Dee Dee and Shirley are coming over to call on you some afternoon soon, when they are

dressed up, but I thought I'd come just as I am," and she smiled ingratiatingly upon Louise. "I thought maybe you'd like to get acquainted with them through me."

"Of course I should," assented Louise. "Grandpa used to know your father when he was a boy and has a very high opinion of him."

"Yes," Madge agreed, "everybody has. He has the biggest kindness in his heart and the merriest twinkle in his eye, and we do have such good times with him! He's got everything but riches, though Dicey says we're riches enough for one man. I don't quite see that—specially when we're naughty so often," and a worried look came over the little visitor's comical face. "But, then, you know the story books say that when the fairies keep back riches, they put in an extra measure of fun. And that's just what they must have done to Father in his cradle!"

"And is your mother fond of fun, too?"

"Yes, but she don't *make* it like Father and Shirley and me. We're the fun-makers. And Polly and Dee Dee (that's Doris, you know) and Mother are the fun-enjoyers. Mother doesn't say much," Madge added loyally, "but the smile in her eyes and the squeeze of her hand keep telling you how much she loves you inside—even when you've been naughty."

"Are Shirley and Dee Dee your older sisters?"

"Yes, Dee Dee's the oldest. Her initials are D. D., the same as your grandfather puts at the end of his name, only Father says *his* mean a kind of minister-doctor. She's named Doris for Mother, you know, and Dicey says she's most like her of any of us; but, of course, it would be too mix-up-y to have two of the same name in one house. Father says Dee Dee's great trouble is that she's oversensitive, not just plain sensitive, you know, but *oversensitive*. Dee Dee's the storyteller of the family. I don't mean a liar, of course," she added hastily. "I'm the most untruthful one, I believe—but, then as my first teacher said—I'm not really so untruthful as over-imaginative, you know. Perhaps!"—with a sigh—"but it surprises you how often they turn out the same thing, don't they?"

Then, as though dismissing unpleasant memories, she rattled on, "Yes, Dee Dee tells splendid stories, out of her head, you know—the kind that'll go in a book some day. I know you'd just love them, and her, too! And Shirley's the one that walks as if she's just jumped off a springboard. She's got freckles, too; but I overheard Dicey say they'll all fade out when she grows up, and she'll be very fassernating, only you mustn't let on, for fear she'll be conceited, you know. Although she's the family tease, she can't stand the littlest smitch of teasing herself. She won't even let us

call her 'Curlykin Shirleykin.' They say her hair is copper-colored, but in some lights it looks plain red to me, though I wouldn't dare tell her so. Well, Shirley——"

Madge just had to stop to catch her breath, then: "Shirley's always jigging along, and she says words go dancing through her head, too, that come out rhymes. But I'd rather recite rhymes than make them up, wouldn't you?"

"And who are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm just Madge," and the child made an apologetic grimace. "Shirley'd tell you that I'm the one that's always losing my round garters. She said she did hope that I wouldn't always be pulling up my stockings when we moved to this new place, but—you never can tell, can you? I'm sure I don't do it on purpose," and she giggled at Shirley's disgust. "I'm not smart about anything, you see. In fact, when you get to know me better, you'll find I'm quite *un-smart*—not a bit like Polly."

"And which one is Polly?"

"Polly's number four. Father calls her Polly because she likes to use big words—'polysyllables'—he calls them, but her real name is Miriam. Father says that instead of Miriam Deane, she ought to be called Pollysyllable Johnson Deane, after that terrific old man that made up a whole dictionary. She's very thorough and ingenious,

you know, though she's just turned eleven. As Dicey says, when you want a thing well done, get Polly to do it. She's slow but she's sure. Father says she's the tortoise—that's why he sometimes calls her "Tortums"—in the fable of 'The Hare and the Tortoise.' You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed! But who's the Hare?"

"Why, me, of course! You see, it's this way—I always start out as fast as lightning, but somehow—there are so many things on the way—and somehow—though pokey Polly's really a very slow mover, she always gets there first. You see, I'm s'posed to be racing to weed a garden place for Dicey's parsley bed right now, but you wouldn't know it, would you?"

"Can't say that I would," and Louise's hearty laugh reached even to her grandfather in his library. Then, greatly interested, she asked, "And who is the baby curlyhead?"

"I suppose you mean Lisbeth, though the twins, Prue and Sue, are the babies and are going to have curls some day when their teeny-weeny curly-cues grow long enough. Poor Mother! What a time she'll have keeping them all curled up!"

"Lisbeth is that darling little one that lisps, isn't she? She looks just like an angel with her blue eyes and golden curls."

"Um-hum! But I don't b'lieve you'd think

she's much of an angel if you'd see her in one of her awful tempers sometimes."

"Tempers! That child? I don't believe she'd ever have a temper if she wasn't tormented into it!"

"Yes, that's it! She doesn't have them very often, but when she does, my! they're—*so* funny!" And Madge burst out laughing. "She's in the closet now having one—banging on the door dreadfully, and jumping up and down, and calling Mother perfectly awful names because she had to put her there."

"Too bad!" And Louise's pale face showed the greatest sympathy. "What started her off?"

Madge was just about to change the subject, but seeing her chance to narrate a dramatic story, with herself as the central figure, she threw herself into it with her usual impulsiveness.

"Well, you see, it was this way. Mother asked me to amuse Polly and Whizzie this morning while she was helping Dicey with the baking, and so I thought up every game I could think of. First I took them up in the barn, and we were in the midst of playing a lovely game in the hayloft when I happened to think of a better one—playing runaway horses in the road. They didn't want to come down, but when I told them how exciting it would be, they did. And, pretty soon—it got

so hot in the road, you know—I thought how much cooler it would be to play my pet game of Captain Kidd and the pirates' cave down in the cellar; but we'd hardly started to whooping down there when Dicey cleared us out of that. And then I showed them a way to get the gooseberries on our side of the fence, by squatting down and picking those that come through from the next yard—and those that you can reach over there, too! I'd been doing it for several days, and I think it was good of me to tell them about it, don't you?"

Madge fidgeted uneasily. "But it would all have come out right," she chattered on, "if only Lisbeth hadn't cried when the thorns pricked her. And then that old woman heard her, and scolded us like time, and drove us off. Well, then, Whiz-zie cried some more, and I didn't know what game to make up next, so I thought I'd amuse myself by teasing Polly about a big photograph they had taken of her six years ago, with her ruffled panties showing, *way* down! They don't wear them that way now," she chuckled, "though I guess it was very stylish then. But I never can stir Polly up, so next I tackled Lisbeth.

"I thought I'd amuse myself by breaking her of her bad habit of lisping. I said, 'Say, "The lance went zip."' 'The lanth went thib,' she said. It was awfully comical to see her try to twist her

tongue. By keeping her saying it over and over, she got it right sometimes, but I never let on for fear she'd elapse. Then I said, 'Now, get it right twenty-five times, and then you can go!' And do you know, she wouldn't even *try* again! And she began to get dancing mad and cry, and I tried to keep her still by telling her I'd let her off on twenty times.

"And, oh, yes, I *did* call her 'Withie' to tease her," Madge admitted. Somehow she wasn't making out as good a story for herself as she had planned. "You know she's named Elizabeth Fairlee for Mother whose name was Doris Elizabeth Fairlee, but the child never could pronounce her own name and always called herself 'Whiz' and 'Whizzie,' for short. So, the more I called her 'Withie,' the more she jumped up and down and hollered, with her short curls bobbing all around her face with every jump. Oh, she *did* look so comical! And just then Mother came out and said, 'What's the matter with my dear little namesake?'—just as sweet—'What's the matter with my Whizabeth?' And would you believe it, that made her madder than ever, and she just yelled, 'I hate your old name, you old Liz!—Piz!—Marm!—Parm, you!'" Madge rolled off the step in a paroxysm of laughter.

"The poor little thing!" And Louise smiled ruefully. "Is she still in the closet?"

"I guess so! She was marm-parming at the top of her lungs when I slipped out of the door. Whenever the pounding and kicking stops, Dicey—who hates to have her give way to her awful tempers because she says it exhausts her so—always goes up to the closet door and says sorter soothing-like, 'Isn't you ready to be good now, you pore lamb?' But that only makes Lisbeth kick the door harder than ever and scream, 'Not yet! Not yet!' So just as I came out, Dicey was half chuckling and half swearing about 'Wait till she kotched that young limb of Satan'—but I don't think that's a nice name to call a—sorry child, do you?—They seem to be making signs for me to come home"—and the uneasy look again flitted across Madge's face. "What do you say to my pushing you right over there to get acquainted? They all seem to be out in the yard now, and I know they want to know you."

"Very well! I was coming over soon anyway—just as soon as Will Walter could come to push me, I——"

"Goodness knows *when* you'd come then," put in Madge eagerly. "On my way over, I heard his aunt setting him to pick potato bugs off, and you know that takes for ever."

"Poor Will!" and Louise's face fell. "He's been my stand-by out here. I get so indignant at his——"

"I'll just trundle you over home, then," interrupted Madge as the beckonings from Tuckaway House became more insistent. And, suiting the action to the word, she pushed the invalid's rolling chair with more zeal than skill across the road.

If Madge expected by this maneuver to distract Mother's attention from herself, she was disappointed. For, after Mrs. Deane's cordial greeting of her neighbor, making the shy, lame girl feel instantly at home with her and her daughters, she said in a low tone to Madge, "Go to your room now, dear; I will talk with you after a while."

Doris passed around a basket of cherries, and Shirley came dancing out with some fresh cookies, singing:

"Cookies hot and cookies cold!
Cookies just three minutes old!"

Entirely unconscious of the miserable child watching their merrymaking from the second-story window, Louise passed the happiest kind of an hour, cuddling the repentant Lisbeth on her lap and trying to teach her to pronounce her name. When leaving, Louise asked Mrs. Deane to be sure to come over to see her grandfather. "He means to come here," she said, "but he is so absent-minded and so deep in his book that he wouldn't remember to eat if Mrs. Mudge didn't force him to."

"Mr. Deane and I had planned to come over some evening this week and pay our respects to his former teacher," said Mrs. Deane, thanking her; "but we'll wait till after the children are all in bed. After they are safely tucked away upstairs, we feel that they are *so safe*." Such a queer expression, half smile and half consternation, flashed across Louise's face that Mrs. Deane, always on the alert for a shock where her little human dynamos were concerned, determined to go that very night.

"We do so enjoy watching your little folk after they have gone upstairs," said Doctor Ward, after welcoming his former pupil several hours later. "They seem to be five of them lying on the floor with their bare feet hanging out of the window and——"

"*What!*" and Mr. and Mrs. Deane looked anxiously across the way.

"There are always ten swinging legs," Louise confirmed. "I count them every night. I suppose I might not have noticed them if it wasn't for the funny concert they have every night. They seem to be tuning up now."

Sure enough! The five Deanelets, after undressing, were always allowed to play around the big upstairs room till dark. After they tired of leaping across the trunks put around the open stairway to keep them from falling down, and

playing some of the many games that tireless Madge could make up as fast as a horse could trot, they generally lay down on the floor to cool off, with their feet, or legs, swinging out of the window. Then the ever-ready planner was in her element.

"Now," she would always start them off, "we'll have the carnival chorus, and I'll be conductor! Each of you choose a different tune, and the one who can sing her song longest, beats. I'll take 'Up in a Balloon, Boys,' and Shirley take 'Captain Jinks,' and Polly, you want 'Shoo Fly, Don't Bother Me,' Doris, 'Three Cheers for the Red, White, and Blue,' and Lisbeth stick to 'Whoa, Emma!' Now, when I count three, you all put your fingers in your ears and sing *your* tune at the top of your lungs. One, two, *three!*"

Thereupon ensued the most awful, insistent discord, ending in wild shrieks of laughter.

"Really, I must go home and settle those wild Indians." And Mr. Deane arose hastily. "I had no idea you could hear their rumpus 'way over here."

"No, no, no"—and Doctor Ward laughingly laid a detaining hand on his neighbor's arm. "Just let them let off all the steam they want! Louise and I enjoy it. We call it our vesper song. Just so long as they don't hurt themselves with their gymnastics."

Just then a hand, evidently belonging to someone lying face downward on the floor, was stretched out of one window and grasped by another someone the other side of the wide board division separating the two floor windows. After a while, Madge's head popped out and, grabbing a leg swinging out of the other casement, she let herself down, balancing herself on a ridge below the ledge. Later on, the young gymnast grasped the next window sill and scrambled in.

"Oh, I must put a stop to that! She'll kill herself!" exclaimed Mrs. Deane starting up, greatly frightened.

"Better not disturb them," warned Doctor Ward. "This is generally the wind-up performance of the evening. If you should call or speak, it might startle the child so that she would lose her hold."

"There come the ten legs and feet again," chuckled Louise almost enviously. "How they kick and swing! Dee Dee must be telling the nightcap story now. They told me this morning that Dee Dee always tells them a nightcap while they are all stretched out on the floor just before they go to sleep."

The rest of the call was very pleasant. Mr. Deane and his old teacher passed a delightful hour reminiscing about school days, and Mrs. Deane took the opportunity to draw out the little invalid,

completely winning her confidence. She found that the girl had been thrown so much on her own resources that she had read very widely, but in spite of her numerous book adventures, was really very lonely. She responded with wistful eagerness to Mrs. Deane's gentle mothering, and was delighted to learn that she could borrow a Deanelet whenever time was hanging heavily on her hands. They all rejoiced over the promises held out by the Philadelphia surgeon, and finally Doctor Ward asked Mr. Deane if he would permit his oldest little girl to tutor his granddaughter during the summer.

"Louise must be several years older than your children, but as she has never been able to go to school and has been sheltered all her life, she is still, in many ways, quite a child."

"Surely!" assented Mr. Deane. "Our children have always played together, leading a very simple, outspoken life, but we feel that it is high time for them to begin making friendships outside of the family. I know that Doris would enjoy helping Louise with her lessons, and I should be glad to have someone in our family in this way partially repay some of the inspiration that my old teacher and pastor has always been to me."

When Mr. and Mrs. Deane recrossed the road to Tuckaway House, not a sound was to be heard from the open windows.

"Well, *well*, WELL, Mrs. Doris!" And Father looked quizzically into his wife's eyes. "There's nothing like seeing ourselves as others see us, is there? But I am glad that we did witness it, aren't you? We'll regulate things a little differently hereafter."

"And I thought they were all *so safe* up there," answered Mother a little unsteadily.

And Doctor Ward, pacing up and down the lawn after Louise was settled for the night, looked up at the stars and then over at the hushed little house, saying to himself wistfully: "Children who live in such trustful openheartedness with their earthly parents must drift naturally into oneness with their Heavenly Father!"

CHAPTER VIII

JAM TO-MORROW AND JAM YESTERDAY—
BUT NEVER JAM TO-DAY

GOOD-MORNING, Miss Brook," and Doctor Ward stopped his morning constitutional to smile down upon a small visitor from across the way.

"Don't slow up your walk," replied Madge sociably. "I can manage to keep pacing up and down with you." And with hands clasped behind her back, in unconscious imitation, she strove to match his stride. "Why do you call me 'Miss Brook'?"

"Haven't you ever heard Tennyson's poem called 'The Brook'?"

"Oh, yes, Mother sings it just beautifully!"

"Well, sing a verse to me, and you'll have your answer."

Madge had only to warble:

"And I chatter, chatter, as I go,
To join the brimming river."

Then she grinned up at her tall friend, "Well, if you think that I chatter, chatter as I go to join the brimming river, you must think that you are the brimming river. Professors are always brimful of wisdom, aren't they?"

"Not always. But perhaps you would prefer to be called 'Newspaper'? You are always bringing us such fresh instalments of the news, you know. You have the news sense of a first-class reporter. Sometimes you are even better than a reporter," he bantered.

Madge shrewdly suspected that her quizzical comrade—whom she had fallen into the way of joining in his brief morning exercise—was poking fun at her talkativeness; but even so, perhaps she might turn it to her own advantage. In a flash she decided to capitalize it. It was rather difficult for her chubby legs to keep pace with his long strides but, nothing daunted, she tagged along, saying breathlessly:

"Reporter people get paid for what they do, don't they, just like professor people?"

"Generally, especially if they bring in a scoop."

"Then what'll you pay me for a scoop a week?" asked business-like Madge. "You see," she confided earnestly, "I don't want any money for myself, but we're all trying to make some money for the 'Little Wanderers.' Oh, I just love to hear them sing:

“‘I stood outside the gate,
A po-or, way-far-ing child,’

And the most of us girls are going without things, like sugar and butter and cake, you know, to save their cost for the poor, homeless children. When they asked me what I'd go without, I said 'soap,' but Father wouldn't let me; so I just think I'll be a scooper for you.”

Noticing that the staid Doctor of Divinity was with difficulty drawing down the corners of his mouth, Madge clinched her amazing suggestion with:

“I'll charge you a fifteen-cent shinplaster for a regular piece of news, and a twenty-fiver for a Christmas special! How's that for high?” And she smiled up at him appealingly.

“Here's the first: The day after the Fourth our cousin, Ramona Cardeza, is coming from Spain to spend a few weeks with us before going to boarding school. We've never seen her, and we've never seen her mother either, Aunt Prudence Suzanne, who isn't coming till next year. We're awfully excited about it. Shirley says she can't get Ramona Cardeza's rhyming name out of her head.”

“The next piece of news is: To-morrow Dicey's going down South to 'bush meeting.' Do you know what 'bush meeting' is? She says it's a kind

of outdoor church where converted people give in their experiments. I'll explain it to you."

"No, I must go back to my study now, but I'll let you tell me to-morrow more about your charming galaxy."

"Galaxy! That's a nice name for us. Do you call us that, Doctor Ward, because we are all gals?"

"Oh, no! Because a galaxy is the brilliant band of stars across the heavens. I owe the Little Wanderers thirty cents now, don't I? Very well, here it is! Now I'll give you a piece of news and not make you any charge for it. And to-morrow I'll tell you something about Dee Dee that is a mastodon of a scoop. But here's to-day's: a friend of mine told me yesterday that he was going to invite your father and mother and some of their children for an all-day sail on the Fourth of July."

"Me?"

"No, only the twin stars."

"Well, I'll bring you some more news to-morrow, and the Little Wanderers will be ever so grateful for this!" looking proudly at the crisp little currency notes that the professor had placed in her hand. "I must run home now quick and tell the rest of the Galaxy about the Fourth!"

At home she found the invitation already under discussion. A brother of the president of the bank—a boyhood friend of Mr. Deane's, who owned

a line of lumber boats to New York—had put one of his schooners in good shape for junketing and had invited a small company, including his brother's family, for a day's sail on the river that flowed so peacefully back of "Well Sweep" down to the bay. By making an early start, the sailing party could reach home again in the late afternoon.

A day on the water would be good for the twins, and there was really no reason—except their dislike of leaving four of their little flock alone for the day—why Mr. and Mrs. Deane should not enjoy this unusual outing.

"Ah, do go, Motherree," coaxed Shirley a fortnight later. "We'll get along all right! I'll look after the children! What if Dee Dee has gone to the Centennial with the Wards, don't you think we're smart enough to take care of ourselves all alone until supper time? We'll promise not to have any fire, and not to go off the place. We had such a good time at the Sunday-school picnic yesterday, that we ought to be glad to take our turn at home."

"If Dicey were only here!" exclaimed Mother. But Dicey had departed two weeks ago, with her ducks, on her annual visit to Virginia to "realize," as she expressed it, with her grandchildren. Much as the Deanes sometimes resented Dicey's apparent ownership of the entire family, she had only to take herself off for a few days for them to

long for her return and welcome her with open arms. She would be back in the kitchen day after to-morrow, but that didn't help with to-morrow's problems.

There need be none of the usual uneasiness about danger from fireworks, because the Deane children were never allowed to have any except those set off under Father's supervision. The Wards had gone to Philadelphia to have a great surgeon examine Louise's crippled condition and had taken Doris along for company, to "do" the Centennial with them. And of course Will Walter's stingy old aunt would never allow him a cent for fireworks, not even for torpedoes. As all other places were at least half a mile away, and the Deanelets eagerly promised again not to play with fire, or even have one in the kitchen stove, danger on that score was really not worth considering.

So Mother cooked them all a lovely breakfast, and made a double quantity of delicious sandwiches, leaving a generous share for the stay-at-homes' lunch. By six o'clock the picnickers had vanished down the road, and the "four orphans for a day," as Shirley styled them, washed up the dishes in fine style, made the beds and tidied the house.

They weeded a little, arranged some fresh bouquets of flowers, and then began to wonder what

to do with the long day stretching out ahead of them.

"I then't it moth time for dinner?" asked Lisbeth.

"Of course not!" snapped Shirley. "It isn't much after eight o'clock. Let's go out and see how many cherries we can pick up under Will Walter's cherry tree. Thank goodness, the most of them fall over on our side of the fence!"

But as they skipped out to gather their plunder, they were met with instant rebuff. Will Walter, with a big basket already hanging temptingly full on one of the branches, was vigorously shaking the boughs higher up. As the girls came into sight, he called out lustily:

"'Fend picking up any of those cherries! My aunt will set old Snitch on you, if you do! She says the tree's in our yard, and every last one of them is ours, and nobody das't touch one!"

"I das't." Suiting the action to the word, Madge coolly popped a luscious one into her mouth.

"So do I!" And Shirley danced around with twin-stemmed ones swaying from each ear.

Prudent Polly was saying nothing but was quietly filling her pinafore pockets with the largest black-red ox-heart cherries.

"Ah, girls, don't do that!" And Will Walter dropped his usual bossy tone, and leaned cau-

tiously out of the tree. "My aunt'll come out and make an awful row if you do. I know she's spying around somewhere. Go play over in the other corner, and I'll snook you over a whole basket to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" Shirley's nose tilted higher than ever, and each freckle stood out boldly. "Always to-morrow! Just like Alice in the Looking-glass!"

"Yes, to-morrow! Didn't I keep my promise and shake down some for you to pick up yesterday?" Then, seeing that this was making some impression he continued, meanwhile industriously filling another basket, "Take 'em away, Madge, and I'll bring over my part of the croquet set after a while."

Greatly disgruntled, the children retired to the shade of the big sycamore at the other end of the yard.

"Let's play Hop Scotch!"

"Too hot!"

"Hide and Seek, then!"

"Too hot!"

"Jackstones!"

"Everything's too hot!" And Shirley patted the old dog who lay panting before them with her tongue hanging out. "You know that this Fourth of July is just the hottest Fourth ever was, even if it is Centennial Independence Day, don't you,

old Brownie-dog? If we must do something, let's read something cool!"

"All right, I'll get something." And touch-and-go Madge was in the house and back in a jiffy saying, "At first I thought I'd bring out those funny Rollo books and Lucy books that Louise Ward gave us. But then I thought, 'After all, they might be boresome on such a hot day, even if their goodity is so chillsome,' so I brought dear old Heidi. Just listen to this! Wouldn't this make you shiver, even on the Fourth of July?" And she read eagerly:

"The weather got colder and colder, and when Peter came up in the morning, he had to blow on his cold hands, he was so frozen. . . . A deep snow had fallen overnight. Heidi stood at the window, watching the snow falling down. It kept on snowing till it reached the windows; still it did not stop, and soon the windows could not be opened. . . . Later, the tight-packed, frozen snow was crackling under every step. . . . When they went out into the glistening snow, no sound was heard and the snow-laden fir trees shone and glittered in the sun. . . . The sun came out for a short time at noon, and the next morning the whole Alp glistened and shone like crystal. . . ."

This cooling reading came to an abrupt close when Will arrived with some croquet wickets and stakes. Some time before, the girls had found mallets and balls in a new box in one of the stalls of their barn, and Will had long promised to complete the set with the missing articles that he had

discovered behind the logs in his own woodshed. Undoubtedly they had originally belonged to the same set.

Forgetting all about the heat, the children, with much discussion and measuring, arranged the wickets in the customary order and were soon deep in an exciting game. With upraised mallet and one foot on her ball, Madge was just about to tight-croquet Will's ball "to kingdom come" when a voice from across the fence shrilled:

"Will Walter, you can just bring back them wickets and striped poles to where you got 'em! If them lazy girls ain't got nuthin' better to do than knock balls around all day, you have. As soon as you've took them things back where you found 'em, you can light out and clean the pig pen. Great lazy hulk of a boy, you ain't wuth your salt!"

Will had flushed and turned surly at once, yet seemed afraid to disobey the termagant.

"Please let us finish this one game, won't you?" implored Madge in her most wheedling tones. "Just this one, and then I'll bring all the wickets right back to your house. Truly I will."

"Not another crack!" barked the woman; and then turning grimly on Madge; "You're the head and front, I notice, of all the mischief that's going on! You must cost your father a pretty penny in elastic, the way you seem to be losing your gar-

ters all the time," she hooted. "That must be why he can't find money enough to buy you a Sunday sash. You're the only one without any on Sundays, I notice, and then you always remind me of a rooster without its tail."

Crestfallen for an instant, Madge soon got her spirit back and retorted gamely:

"Well, then, we'll help Will take your old wickets up, but we'll play the game just the same right under your nose. You see if we don't!" Tossing the wickets over the fence, the resourceful Madge ran into the house and brought out two old brooms that she set up in place of the gaily striped stakes.

"Now, while Polly takes the first turn, we'll be wickets—this way." And Madge spread her feet apart. "Shirley, you do the same thing a little ways back of me, and we'll be the first two wickets by the stake, and Lisbeth can run over there and be the third—so. There, now! Fire away, Polly, but aim for the middle and don't hit our feet."

"Good!" cried the excited Polly, "I went through the two of you! Now for Lisbeth's arch!"

So, by dint of much exercise, sometimes standing little twigs in the holes left by the wickets when the supply of legs happened to give out, they managed to have a very lively game, their peals of laughter even reaching poor Will, as he was sulkily cleaning the pig pen.

About eleven o'clock, however, the novelty wore off and reminders of their early breakfast began to turn the players' thoughts toward lunch.

"'There's a pain within I cannot still,' said a little voice."

"Oh, Madge, do stop your everlasting 'said-a-little-voicing'!" exclaimed Shirley, petulantly.

"All right," agreed Madge, coming down to earth suddenly. "Don't let's wait till twelve o'clock! Let's see what kind of goodies Mother left for us under that pretty checked cover! Beat you all to the kitchen!" And away flew Madge, with the other three at her heels.

"Well, if the sandwiches they're eating on the boat are half as yum-yummy as these, they must be powerful good! They're what Dicey calls 'lickin' good,'" chuckled Madge. "Let's see how many Mother left us!" She counted them carefully. "Oh, Goody! Twenty, that's five apiece."

"Wonderful how quick you can figure when there's something good to eat around," jibed Shirley.

"Cookies, too!" continued Madge ignoring her. "Three apiece to eat with our milk. 'I'll give mine to darling sister,' said a little voice."

"Oh, Madge! I get so sick of your 'said a little voice,' like those saintly children in the goody books!"

Madge only giggled and carried out her plate to be washed.

By the time the dishes were all clean, the children were disgusted to find that it was only midday. "How shall we *ever* put in the long afternoon?" was written on each child's face.

"I know one thing that we can do," suggested Polly the plump. "Instead of putting these dishes back in the cupboard, we can put them right on the table, so that Mother will find it all set for supper when she gets home at four o'clock."

Good idea! Many hands made light work, and in a few minutes the table was daintily set, a fresh bouquet in the center, and all the "silvers" laid nice and straight at each place, just as Mother liked to have them.

"But it isn't quarter past twelve yet," yawned Shirley, putting the chairs around for the big folks, and setting in place the high chairs for Prue and Sue. "I never knew time to drag so! Now, what shall we do?"

"I know what I'm going to do," announced Madge promptly. "I'm going out to ride Jack-horse, that big old log lying under the speckled sycamore tree. After I'm tired of riding him, I'm going to read you some of the Elsie books in a new way, so I'll just take a few along. Don't you all want to come along?"

"Might as well do that as anything," assented Polly unenthusiastically. "Coming, Shirley?"

"No, guess I'll take a nap."

Now Shirley knew very well that she wasn't going to take a nap. No Deane ever took a nap except under compulsion. She knew perfectly well, too, that she was going to do something very different, something that she didn't want her sisters to see her doing.

Back of a tiny trunk in the attic, she had the day before discovered a pile of *Godey's Lady Books* filled with quaint fashion plates and namby-pamby tales that even her story-hungry mind could not digest. Mixed in with the simpering books, however, were some tattered old *Waverley* magazines filled with exciting stories. She hadn't even asked if she could read them, so sure had she been of refusal. Anybody could see at a glance that they specialized in the three M's—Mush, Mystery, and Murder. Her common sense told her that Father and Mother would never want her to fill her curly head with such sensational trash as the cheap, lurid pictures showed these thrilling stories to be; so she had reluctantly tucked them back into their hiding place.

But this hot afternoon, with time hanging so heavily on her hands, why not slip upstairs and browse among them for an hour while the others were playing outdoors? In a few minutes she

was lying flat on the attic floor, facing the front window, so that she could keep her eye out for the return of the excursionists, with a magazine spread on the floor between the arms on which her head was propped. Her promise to look after her younger sisters was entirely forgotten as her excited attention followed the efforts of a lily-white maid to reform a drunken lover, as she hesitated between his passionate protestations and those of Sir Galahad Banks. Clad in a crimson velvet robe trimmed with ermine, the gallant Sir Galahad was saying haughtily to the lily-white maid: "You have spurned to-day the coronet of the noble house of Banks, milady fair, but when, a year hence, I come again on my mettlesome steed, it will be you who will sue on bended knee."

"Hum—I wonder if she did!" Finding that the next page was missing, and that she could never know the outcome of this knightly romance, Shirley, after a reassuring glance out of the window, succumbed to the attractions of a burglar story that soon held her enthralled. She had just reached the point where the masked safe-crackers had come to the banker's house, and had gagged the noble cashier and his beautiful wife, while brave little Rosalie had slipped unobserved under the table where she was hidden by the long, fringed cover, when . . . rat-a-tat-tat came a knock at the door of Tuckaway House! Poking

the book back under the rafters and running hastily downstairs, Shirley found that Neighbor Jones, living a half-mile farther down the road, had kindly left in passing a letter that he had found at the post office when inquiring for his own mail.

"Who's it for? . . . Who's it for, Shirley?" clamored the children, who had raced across the yard when they heard the knock. "Oh, it's for Mother, from Dee Dee, but we can't know what's in it till Mother reads it—perhaps it's to say she'll be home to-morrow. But we can't know till to-morrow."

"That's another thing for to-morrow," Shirley continued to fret. "Will Walter's cherries, and Father's surprise, and now Dee Dee's fat letter. I just know that it tells all kinds of lovely things about the Centennial, too! I wish the Wards had asked *me* to go!"

"Just think!" said Polly thoughtfully. "Just a hundred years ago to-day, they were signing the Declaration of Independence, and our Dee Dee's listening to the Independence Celebration at the Centennial. Perhaps at this very instant——"

"Let's have an Independence Celebration of our own," Madge broke in. "I'll stand on that stump that the end of old Jackhorse is resting on, and give you a stump speech. I'll recite first Whit-tier's ode beginning, 'God of our Fathers,' writ-

ten specially for the Centennial." And she delivered the solemn words with impressive effect. "Now, Shirley, it's your turn! You speak, 'Sail on, O Ship of State!'"

Rather reluctantly Shirley recited Longfellow's stirring lines. Polly, impressed by the thought that, at this moment, her sister might be viewing the historic bell, followed with the poem about the great cracked bell in Philadelphia that proclaimed liberty to all the land. Then Elizabeth piped up with "The Thtar-thpangled Banner." They all joined in lustily, and then concluded with "My Country, 'tis of Thee." The impromptu celebration was a great success and incidentally killed an idle hour.

As they finished the last verse, Shirley started back to the house. She *must* find out what happened to the banker's daughter before Mother and Father should come home!

"Ah, come on back, Shirley," pleaded Madge. "I'm going to try to read the weeping Elsie books in a new way. Do you know how many times the word 'tears' comes on these pages? I counted them one afternoon when Mother sent me to bed early. I played the bed was St. Helena and counted the tears like Napoleon did his marshals. Now, I'm going to say 'lollipops' every time it says 'tears,' and see how it will work out. Don't

you want to hear how lollipops rained down Elsie's face, or how many times she broke into lollipops in one day?"

But Shirley shook her head and hurried away. As she gained the raftered hiding place, she could hear the voice of the mercurial Madge leading the others in "No, no, no! Not for Jo! Not for Joseph, No, no, no." Dear old Madge! How tireless she had been this hot day! How resourceful in keeping up the spirits of the others! And Shirley asked herself if she ought not to go back and help? As the oldest of the home group, of course she ought, but . . . *Did* they find Rosalie under the table? She must read just that far!

And Shirley hurriedly took the magazine from its hiding place and read eagerly that Rosalie waited till the bold, black-bearded burglars went down to the bank on the floor below to rob the safe. Then, "Quick as a flash"—so ran the tale—"she darted out from her retreat under the sheltering tablecloth and—at the peril of her life—rushed out into the street and, falling into the arms of a brave officer who was passing, told him of the robbery.

"But, oh, woe of woes! The officer to whom the brave child told her dreadful secret was not a real policeman at all! Instead, he was a wolf in sheep's clothing, an accomplice whom the bold,

black-bearded burglars had dressed up in a blue coat with brass buttons, to keep watch for them while they were blowing up the safe. Clapping his grimy hands upon Rosalie's rosebud mouth, he muttered——"

Hastily Shirley turned the leaf. Nothing there but patent medicine advertisements! Bewildered, she turned back only to find in fine print at the foot of the page: "Continued in our next." Oh, *what* did he say to brave Rosalie? Perhaps she would have time to look carefully through the other numbers and find the sequel. Somewhere she recalled having seen a terrible picture entitled "Lioness-hearted Rosalie Dragged Away by a Brutal Bandit." She simply *must* know!

"Thirley, where are you?" Lisbeth was trudging up the stairs. Hastily slamming the magazine into the little hair trunk, Shirley ran to meet her on the top step. "Thirley, we want our thupper now! They haven't come back, and we are *tho* hungry!"

"All right!" And taking her pet sister pickaback, Shirley carried her down the stairs.

"We thought we'd get supper early," explained Madge, "and go upstairs and undress. It's so hot, and we've lazed away the whole afternoon. We can sing and tell stories in our nighties, and watch out to see if they send up any sky rockets out Sharon way. Then, if we hear Father and

Mother coming back, we can run down and kiss them good-night. And they won't have to bother about our supper, or putting us to bed, or anything."

"All right!" again agreed Shirley. "Let's wait till half-past six, and then, if they're not here, all go upstairs."

"Oh, *you* mustn't come up, Shirley!" Madge was a splendid manager and disciplinarian for other people. "You're the oldest, and you must stay up and be dressed so's to answer the door if anybody comes. There's nothing to be afraid of, dear child, 'said a little voice.'"

As she bounded upstairs with her devoted slaves, Polly and Whizzie, a miserably lonely feeling began stealing over Shirley. She locked the kitchen door and the side-porch door and put the catch on the front door. By this time, Madge was singing lustily, "Rescue the Perishing." Then she veered to "From Greenland's Icy Mountains." The missionary urge was strong upon Madge just now. India's coral strand, Africa's sunny fountain and heaps of golden sand sounded most alluring to her. But in her extreme youth, the spicy breezes and palmy plains fired her imagination with visions of coconuts and ostrich plumes rather than with sympathy for the heathen in his blindness. Which now would a youthful missionary look nicest in, a strand of coral from India or a

sealskin coat from Greenland? Well, they'd sing it all through once more while she made up her mind. And to Shirley's consternation, they again started the spirited old hymn. To keep it from rasping her edgy nerves, Shirley at first tried to join in with them, but stopped when her voice echoed eerily through the empty rooms.

Shirley had so often teased her sister for shirking; but it was certainly Madge who had taken the brunt of things this hot day, and it was Shirley who had been the shirker! To get such an unpleasant thought out of her mind, the lonesome girl picked up a book and read as long as she could see. Oh, why didn't Father and Mother come!

"See any rockets?" she called upstairs.

"Only two or three. Whizzie's all tired out, so we're going to put her to bed."

"I'll do it," volunteered Shirley, joining the others quickly. Anything to get upstairs with the others!

"Guess Polly and I'll go, too, now it's getting dark. Nothing worth waiting for over Sharon way. You ought to be downstairs, Shirley, case anybody comes."

"Oh, nobody'll come this time of night."

"You never can tell," with a long yawn.

"Good-night!"

Shirley groped her way down and found the moonlight casting ghost-like shadows in the front

rooms. If she could only have crawled in beside her sisters! She who had rebelled all summer at the early bed hour and had longed for the fall days when Dee Dee and she were going to be allowed to "sit up!" If she could only read something new and interesting now, and forget that awful Rosalie story! But she didn't dare to light the lamp. To be sure, when she promised Father not to make any fire, she had never thought about lamps. Neither had he, because the party had expected to get home before dark; and perhaps he would rather she'd do it than sit there in the gloom with her hair almost standing on end. But no! something might happen. She might upset the lamp. A promise was a promise, and, for a few moments, she felt very virtuous, sitting alone in dreary silence. Then she became restless, groping her way through all the downstairs rooms again and again.

If any one should come now, what did she have to defend herself with? Nothing. Peering anxiously around, she noticed a moongleam on the castor in the center of the supper table. Taking from it the red-pepper cruets, she exclaimed valiantly, "At least I can get the best of the bandits by throwing red pepper in their eyes!"

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before the knocker on the front door beat a loud tattoo. Shirley's first impulse was to run upstairs

and jump into the crossways bed. But, no! Such cowardice would be unworthy of a banker's daughter. Slipping the red-pepper bottle into her pinafore pocket, she crawled on her hands and knees to the row of narrow glass panes on each side of the great front door. Raising her head just high enough to peer out, she saw to her horror, that the moonlight was glancing on the brass buttons of a burly policeman. Ducking down, she wondered what heroic deed she could now perform à la Rosalie.

Another silence-shattering tattoo echoed through the house. Well, if she must, she must! So, stealthily pushing back the catch and turning the knob, she catapulted out of the door, dashing the pepper—not in the visitor's eyes, for they were several feet above her reach—but somewhere above his knees. In fact, he never knew that he had been bombarded, so well was he padded with fatty tissue; but he wondered when he undressed a few hours later, why he was seized with such a violent fit of sneezing.

"Bless my heart, little girl," he said kindly, taking her hand and pulling her up, "you almost fell, didn't you? Hasn't your father got home yet?"

"No, he hasn't." . . . Oh, where could she hide?

"Well, now, that's too bad! It's from Sharon

I've come to tell your father that there are no lights in the bank this night. That new watchman ain't on to his job yet. If I'd 'a' known his name, I'd 'a' gone right to him without coming 'way out here to disturb your father. Perhaps, now, you happen to know the watchman's name, little girl?"

"It's Mr. Mudge," faltered Shirley.

"Oh, Mike Mudge, is it! Well, then, I'll be moving along and get him to light up. Good-night, little girl. Your father'll be home soon. The boat's just waiting the turn o' the tide, I guess."

Shirley's heart sank, and in her depression she forgot to fix the catch again. Things looked spookier than ever in the living room. Stealing upstairs and perching on the top step she could hear her sisters breathing heavily. The longer she stayed near them, the more she dreaded going down again alone. Well, if she must, she must!

As she reached the last step, the kitchen clock viciously rasped out nine strokes, startling her more than ever. The chair creaked. A mouse squeaked in the wall. A twig tapped at the front pane, and every once in a while, the floor gave an unearthly crack. Would they never come? Outside, a whippoorwill seemed jerking out his mournful cry with mechanical iteration. She always hated whippoorwills. Soon there was a thud against one of the windows, and then two

glaring eyes were pressed again the pane. How green they were, looking right through her! If burglars had green eyes, where could she hide? She was just backing out of their range when a miaouw told her that it was the cat.

Again she jumped as the whirring clock wheezily cleared its throat preparatory to striking ten. She was now filled with distress because she had told the officer the name of the bank watchman. Perhaps that wasn't a real policeman, either. Perhaps he had just dressed up that way like those in the story, and now that he had found out that her father wasn't home, perhaps he'd go back and tell the bold black-bearded burglars that were robbing the safe. Then they would come out here to the dark house and then . . . Why! . . . the burglars were here already! She was sure that she heard someone coming softly on the stepping stones and then stealthily turning the door handle. There! They were trying it again! They had found out that she had not put the catch down! Now they were trying a latchkey! Now they were opening the door! Quick, oh quick! And, true to form, the banker's daughter ducked under the table, pulling the tablecloth safely down in front of her. Clutching the red-pepper bottle, she listened intently.

At first they were whispering. Then a familiar bass voice said:

"All of them asleep! Bless their hearts! Lots of grit in our children, Mother!" And he struck a match. "Can you see to put your twin on the sofa beside mine? Now I'll light a lamp and we'll go up and take a look at them to be sure they're all right. . . . Why! what's this?"

And the banker jumped back in amazement as his weeping daughter peered out from the tablecloth fringe. Flinging herself into his arms, she cried:

"Oh, I was *so* scared! And I read a bad book I hadn't ought to! And a policeman came out to tell you the bank wasn't lighted, and I thought maybe he was a dummy burglar, and when I heard the key in the door, I hid under the table like Rosalie. I—I——"

"There, there! Curlykins!" And he took her on his knee, giving her a reassuring hug. "I don't wonder you were frightened, alone here in the dark! The sailboat was becalmed several hours, and the rest of the party decided to stay down the bay in the moonlight to await the turn of the tide. But Mother and I kept thinking about our four chickabiddies all alone here. So we borrowed the little boat and rowed up to the landing back of 'Well Sweep,' and here we are again!"

As he stroked the white, tear-stained face, there came into his mind Dicey's description of Shirley's pallor when seasick a few years before: "Her

face was that white, Marse Jawge, each freckle stood out so's you could a picked it off with a hat-pin!"

"Now you help Mother get the twinkins into their cribs while I look around a bit. Then Mother and I will light you upstairs and tuck you in. Do you know that it's almost midnight?"

"Bring me the books to-morrow, Shirley dear," said Mother, giving her a good-night kiss. "We'll burn them all, and we'll never even think of them again. We have great plans for to-morrow, you know. So go to sleep trying to guess what they are."

"All right, Motherree, I will—to-morrow! All day it's been just as the White Queen said: 'Jam *to-morrow* and jam yesterday—but never jam to-day.'"



CHAPTER IX

LADY TEASER

SOME sage once said that the principal difference between human beings and beasties is that animals have no sense of humor. Well, that man never knew Lady Teaser, the mischievous kitten-humorist of Tuckaway House! From the very day that she opened her bright, blue-gray eyes upon a troublous world, she began taking life as a joke.

It was indeed a troublous world to her and to her three kitten brothers, because, on that day, Snitch, the quarrelsome sheep dog next door, had killed Calamity, the old mother cat. Her orphaned kits would then have had to be drowned, had not old Brownie-dog promptly adopted them. It was really a beautiful sight to see stepmother Brownie guarding them alertly during the night

or, asleep in the sun, with the four balls of fluff snuggled up to her shaggy coat in kitten comfort, or watching them out of one half-closed eye as they pawed their little pink noses, chased their tails, or frisked happily through the long, sunny hours.

But from the first, it was evident that the coal-black kitten was the ringleader in all their play and mischief. From the very beginning, it was she who, with arched back, pounced out from the bushes and challenged her drowsy brothers to a rousing good game of Puss in the Corner. When they were tuckered out, she would begin teasing the motherly Brownie, tapping at her with her ridiculous little paw, or settling comfortably down upon the old dog's neck where she could not be reached, refusing to dismount or to be shaken off.

When Lord Jim, the molting peacock, strolled over from across the way, parading by, majestically waving the only long feather left in his great tail, Lady Teaser would crouch, run at it sidewise, spring, and vault clear across it, then back again—thus having a lovely game of Leap-frog all to herself as she trailed the unconscious peacock strutting across the lawn.

“Just look at her shoot across that lonely feather!” chuckled the watching children. “She takes it like a hurdle!”

“She certainly seems full of pernicious activity

this morning," said roly-poly Polly proudly. "Mother promised her to me the day we first saw the kittens with poor Calamity, and Whizzie named her Snowball because her claws were so white."

"But Father changed her name to Lady Teaser," said Madge, "because she's always teasing with that paw of hers."

"Well, she's mine, anyhow, no matter what you call her, and I'm just going to put my mark on her!" And Polly quickly slipped the Roman-striped ribbon from her long braid and tied it in a fetching bow around the glossy fur neck.

So proud was the childish owner of a pet so becomingly decorated that she cuddled her little black beauty till Dicey rang the great clanging bell for supper; then, always on hand where there was anything good to eat, Polly flung down the kitten roughly and raced for the table. Elizabeth picked up the discarded little creature, cuddled her compassionately, and then, when the bell rang a second time, hung her sailor hat on the hall rack and—also, alas!—hung the kitten there, too, by its gay striped noose!!!

Do you wonder that wee Lady Teaser found this a sad world during her kittenhood? As if it wasn't bad enough to be an orphan and brought up by a kindly dog, and now here she was hung up for the night on the hat rack! I wish that I could

tell you that when Father came home shortly after, he found her there, took her down tenderly, and laid her with the others, snuggled up to old Brownie-dog! But, no, that wasn't the case! Polly's big sailor hat hid her dangling pet, whose piteous baby miaouws were unheard by the laughing little folk trooping out from supper. So there she hung the night long, the brim of the hat probably easing the pull of the noose, living through in those dark dragging hours several of the nine lives that every cat is suppose to live.

Not till Father started for the bank the next morning, taking his straw hat from the rack, did he find the poor little thing hanging there—more dead than alive, he thought. He called for a saucer of warm milk, set it on his knee, and tried to get the limp little ball of black fur to take some interest in it. As their pet ignored the milk, the children stood around with tears in their eyes. After a while, Father dipped his finger in the liquid and let a drop or two fall on the kitten's nose. She obligingly licked it off. He did it again and again with the same result, and finally held the saucer close to her. Out came her rough, pinkish bit of a tongue and lapped it all up. And then, stretching her numb little legs, she climbed wearily up to her perch on Father's shoulder. And then—the children holding their breath for fear the poor little thing would collapse—out

flashed that Pucksy little paw, and off fell Father's glasses, secured, because of Lady Teaser's previous tricks, by a cord to his coat revers.

The children gave a shout of triumph, and all held out eager arms as the kitten proved so plainly that she had come into her own again.

"Give her back to me, she's mine," cried Polly; and as Father looked at her reproachfully, she added stubbornly in a subdued voice, "*She is* mine, because I gave up my new ribbon for her."

"And she nearly gave up her life for the ribbon," said Father, still withholding the kitten, clambering from one of his shoulders to the other.

"But I'll never, never let anybody hang her up again," wailed Polly. "Whizzie didn't know it might strangle her. I'll be extra good to Lady Teaser all the rest of her life to make up for it, I love her so."

"We all love her," relented Father, restoring the pet to her weeping mistress, "and we'll all try to make it up to her for that awful night."

And so they all loved Lady Teaser more than ever.

Mother loved the frisky kitten, even though that bothersome paw of hers struck out many times when she was trying to thread a needle. And she specially loved the lively little pet because she amused the twins so successfully, never scratching, but keeping them quiet for hours at a time by her

way of whirling around after her tail, her quick bounds for a scurrying leaf or waving bough, or, scaling the gutter pipe, by her sudden leaping down before them and skipping out of their way before they could grab her.

Dicey loved the kitten, of course, because she had brought up Calamity, the poor old mother cat, and saved her choicest tidbits for what she called her "four-legged imp of teasingness."

Doris loved the kitten even though, when she was trying patiently to knit a "fascinator," Lady Teaser would spring for the rolling ball, carry it off into the bushes, and tangle it all up, causing the patient knitter to drop many stitches in her efforts to reclaim her worsted.

And Father loved the kitten, too, because she was always at the end of the lane to meet him when he came home at night, jumping out from some bush or tree and running up like a squirrel to her favorite perch on his shoulder.

In these ways, Lady Teaser was as companionable as a puppy, dogging the children in their games and following them whenever they left the place. Sometimes, however, this comradeship had its drawbacks, and the kitten had to be shut up in the kitchen with Dicey.

One day when Doris and Polly were hurrying to church—full five minutes behind the others—they were dismayed to find Lady Teaser perched

at the top of the broad steps leading up to the white-pillared Meeting House. The bell was giving the three warning rings that said that the minister was already in the pulpit and the service about to begin.

"Quick, Dee Dee, take her back!" ordered Polly.

The obliging Dee Dee generally obeyed such commands for the sake of peace, but to-day the family doormat refused to be trampled on.

"Take her back yourself, she's your cat!" and Dee Dee hurried in to join the others in the front pew.

Bashful Polly hesitated a moment, longing to dash in after Dee Dee; for she hated the thought of going up that interminably long aisle alone. But if she tagged after her older sister, Lady Teaser would surely tag after her. And if she caught up her pet and took her with her, she could not keep her hidden long; and then Father would be sure to send them out, which would be still worse—having to walk down that long aisle facing a congregation staring at the cat in her arms.

So making a grab for the kitten, she seized her rather roughly, rushed home with her, and hurled her none too gently into Dicey's kitchen.

As she slammed the door, her besetting sin assailed her, and she just had to look into the hall

mirror to see if her hat was on straight. Not that she was a vain little girl; but she was fussy, and her fidgetiness about her clothes had earned her the family name of "Prinkie." In fact, it was because she had fussed so this morning over the elastic, slightly too long, that she thought spoiled the set of her new hat, that she had worn Dee Dee's patience threadbare and caused them to be a little late to church. And now, because of her wild rush with Lady Teaser, here was the hat over one ear again. To hold it tighter, she snapped the elastic under her chin. No, that would never do! Everybody looked so ugly with elastics under their chins! Well, then, tying a knot in it, back it must go under the braid, and she would try to walk slowly so as not to jounce the slippery sailor. Quaking squeakily up the aisle, she managed to reach the front pew with the hat still at what she considered the proper angle.

The singing of the hymns, which all the Deane children loved, soon made Prinkie forget her millinery troubles, and when the Elders took from the front of the pulpit the long poles with bags hanging to them, to gather up the pennies, Polly Prinkie settled back for the part of the service that she enjoyed most. It was not just the fun of dropping a penny into the bag that was poked into their front pew. That was soon over with. But

what the Deanelets most relished was the amazing pieces of music with which Timothy Boyle, the organist, favored them during the offertory.

He had a curious way of using some of the liveliest tunes simply by slowing down their time, or changing them from major to plaintive minor key. Even "Yankee Doodle," you know, becomes almost unrecognizable when played in a minor key, in the time of a funeral march. The Deane children were musical enough to take great pleasure in tracing the originals of Mr. Boyle's daring transpositions. For instance, when he had the choir sing "Nearer my God, to Thee" to the tune of "Robin Adair," or when an Easter anthem pealed forth to the air of the Toreador's Song from the new opera, "Carmen," their delight knew no bounds, even though the staid members of the congregation were suitably scandalized at the liberties that Tim Boyle was taking with their new pipe organ.

"He hasn't set the Doxology to 'Captain Jinks' yet, but there's no telling what he'll do next!" they sighed.

Since the former player of the melodeon felt unequal to tackling the big organ, and since Timothy Boyle on his sober Sundays was willing to play it gratis, for the sheer pleasure of seeing what he could do with it, why not? It was always so exciting to see where he would break out next.

Having just experienced one of his frequent and short-lived reforms, the organist this morning had decided, with more zeal than taste, to announce this fact subtly by playing the drinking song from Faust, decorously slowed down, during the offertory. At that time, the college version was very popular and thoughtlessly sung all over the country by many who were simply carried away by its swing. Therefore, several recognized it at once—for Timothy was so taken up in proclaiming his new resolve that he soon forgot the customary slowing down—and although many feet were unconsciously tapping the exultant tempo, their owners could not but wish that the musician had selected something not so suggestive of the words,

“No, no, I’ll never get drunk any more,
No, no, I’ll never get——”

But on that note something awful happened. Everyone in the congregation jumped as a most unearthly howl came from the organ loft at the back of the church.

“Tim Boyle’s played that too soon,” was the general thought. “He must be half-intoxicated now to dare trying out such a roistering chorus as that! . . . Oh, there it goes again!” And from the gallery above came one fearful caterwaul after another.

As the Elders were still collecting the coins

clinking into the velvet bags, they could not well pause in their tasks. So one or two deacons, beckoning to Mr. Deane, hastened upstairs intending to remove Mr. Boyle from the church as quickly and quietly as possible.

Did they find in the organ loft a jovial tippler whose hand had lost its cunning because of a stealthy drink during the church service? No, they did not! To their great consternation—and especially to Mr. Deane's—they saw a perfectly sober but furious organist holding aloft something limp and black, and roaring so that he could be plainly heard by the shocked, ear-cocked congregation:

“And it's this beast of a Beelzebub that's crawled up me organ pipes, and cut off me wind, and blasted me soul in the eyes of folk who'll niver agin believe that I'm as sober as thimsilves this day! To the divvle with the imp o' darkness!” And he tossed away a bright-ribboned object that Mr. Deane dexterously caught and disappeared with. Thrusting it into his pocket, despite a protesting “miaouw,” he strode hastily home to Tuck-away House.

There an after-church council was held as to the disposition of Lady Teaser. It will never be definitely known—for the Muse of History refuses to clear up the point—whether Dicey, indignant at the unceremonious way in which her pet

had been tossed into her kitchen, had purposely opened the door, or whether Polly Prinkie, absorbed in the set of her hat, had carelessly left the kitchen door ajar. Certain it was, however, that Lady Teaser had persisted in her efforts to attend divine service that morning. If she should continue to play such disgraceful pranks, wouldn't it be better to banish her at once? No, *no*, NO! Everybody protested against it. Everybody promised to watch, shut up, train, and guard this most adorable little torment ever encased in kitten fur. But banish her? *Never!*

All but one member of the household protested against her banishment, and that one was the latest arrival in Tuckaway House. Although this house was already so crowded that three, four, and even five in a bed was no uncommon thing still, on the Fifth of July it had managed to stretch a little more so as to ease in the new cousin, a little girl of twelve. Ramona Cardeza was her name, and she had been sent over from Spain to be educated in America, staying with the Deanes until her boarding school should open in September. The day after the Fourth, Father had driven them all over to the Junction ten miles away so as to give her a royal welcome. *That* was his promised surprise. As they spied in the distance the smoke of her train, Shirley chanted excitedly, to the tune of "Dear Evelina":

“Oh, Ramona Cardeza,
I’d sure like to squeeze her,
I hope we’ll all please her
As soon as she’s here!”

They certainly did please her, and the pale little cousin pleased them, too, until her big black eyes fell on Lady Teaser—and then the trouble began.

“*Ay, Ay de mi!*” she cried out in the Spanish that she unconsciously used when excited, “*El gato!*” (The cat!)

“It’s only a kitten,” they cried in chorus. “It won’t hurt you!”

Now, it is quite probable that Ramona would have long ago forgotten her baby terror of cats had it not been for two things. First, she had heard so often at home how an old *gato* had climbed up to her baby shoulders, sticking its sharp claws into her thin little dress and unintentionally pricking the tender baby skin, that she had lived over the scene again and again; and (secondly) she had gradually come to think of herself as a real little heroine, as much so as the story-book princess attacked by the black beast. And now, thousands of miles away from the first terrible cat was this dusky little imp, lying in wait for her and reminding her a dozen times a day of her baby terror!

Thenceforth, Lady Teaser’s sense of mischievous

fun seemed to make her pick out the strange little girl as the special object of her tricks and antics. No wonder Ramona would have been glad to have the kitten banished! And the little girl went out of her way to show how frightened she could be.

She really had been frightened when, in the dark, she had one night put her hand upon the kitten asleep on her bed, and her scream of dismay brought the entire family to the rescue.

"She won't hurt you one bit, Ramona dear," said Doris soothingly. "See, she's crawling up your dress to make friends, now."

"Oh, take her off! Take her off!" And Ramona ran screaming from the room.

But Lady Teaser was waiting for her on her return, holding out her paw in a friendly, or was it in a teasing, way?

"Go away!" screamed Ramona.

But the tricky paw kept dabbing at her till the little girl in despair started to run upstairs. Lady Teaser seemed to read her mind in a flash, bounded ahead of her on the stairway and, sitting at the top, awaited her with outstretched paw. In vain Ramona tried to duck past it. Whichever way she tried to dodge, a fuzzy bar of black said, "Thou shalt not pass!" Finally she determined to jump over the "witch cat," as she called her, and make a rush for her room where she would lock herself in. But again the uncanny kit seemed to

read her thought and, leaping ahead, took up her station before the door, guarding the entrance and pawing absurdly. Then Ramona gave up and called to her cousins to carry off the little imp.

Indignantly Polly took her charge down to the kitchen, exclaiming to Dicey, "She's just an old 'fraid-cat herself to scream at my little cat! Of course," she conceded, "the darling does prick a little when she climbs up me, too, but I don't fuss about it."

"Huh!" grunted Dicey. "Who yelled, I'd like to know, when my old drake ran after her?"

"But that's different," countered Polly. "He quacked awful and——"

"Afraid's afraid, no matter what's after you! The little Spanish girl never yelled louder than what you did!"

"But that was only once, Dicey, and Ramona keeps it up every time Lady Teaser flies ahead of her on the stairs. I believe she just likes to show off being afraid!"

All the love that Ramona might have had for the cat, she lavished instead upon Brownie, who followed her everywhere, even chasing Lady Teaser away if she threatened to tag along. Seeing this or, perhaps, because Ramona was so taken up with the dog that she ignored the cat, Lady Teaser gradually stopped singling out the little foreign girl, and after a few weeks disappeared



RAMONA AND LADY TEASER

Then Ramona gave up and called to her cousins to carry off the little imp.

completely. Polly began to fear that she had lost her little pet, until one morning she suddenly discovered Dicey feeding her. When the old colored woman was charged with keeping the cat away from Ramona, she answered:

"Well, yore kit's done hid herself away for the best of reasons, but if you-all won't say nothin' to nobody this week, I'll tell you a secret next week that you can be the first to tell the others."

What a joyous commotion it caused when Polly at last proudly announced her grand secret—that Lady Teaser had three little black kittens of her own.

"The very spitting image of they ma," chuckled Dicey, as she volunteered to show them all the new arrivals on the following day.

Early the next morning the old cook triumphantly escorted them to the place in the shed where the three Teaserettes were having breakfast. All went to see them except Ramona. Instead, she whistled to Brownie, who came woofing along in high glee, tramped sullenly around back of the woodshed, and threw herself down sobbing under one of the trees.

"As if *one* horrid little tormenting thing wasn't bad enough! And now there will be three more of her!" she wailed. "Oh, I wish I'd never come! I wish I was home—home—home!"

Brownie's cold little nose came sniffing around

her and kept at it till she lifted her head, patted the dog, and let her lick her hand.

In the shed she could hear her cousins' eager voices calling her to come to see the new arrivals, but she would not budge.

"You're the best friend I've got here! I'd do anything in the world for you, old Brownie-dog! I'd——"

But just then Brownie uttered a low growl. Snitch was coming over to settle matters with his neighbor. He had had it in for her ever since Brownie had punished him for killing old Calamity. Brownie's wiry hair began to bristle, and wriggling out of the arms of the terrified Ramona, she advanced to meet her ancient enemy.

Then ensued those terrible yelps and snarls that proclaim a desperate dog fight. Ramona could not separate them and, fearing that the sheep dog's grip on Brownie's throat would surely finish her, she ran for a dipper of water; for she had seen dogs separated in that way in Spain.

But, just as she was about to throw it, a strange thing happened. Something black came hurtling through the air, landing on the back of Snitch's neck. In his efforts to throw it off, the old sheep dog had to give up his grip on Brownie's throat, and run back and forth trying vainly to rid himself of the black beast clinging to his neck.

"Just look, it's Lady Teaser!" exclaimed the

children, who had been attracted to the spot by the commotion.

"She's digging her claws into Snitch's back! . . . Look at her! . . . Look at her! . . . Pay him back, Teaser, good old Teaser!"

Soon after, the kitten leapt lightly off, and the neighbor's dog, giving a final yelp, slunk through the paling gap into the next yard. The excited Ramona grabbed up Brownie and the little black mother kitten, hugging them both together.

"You saved my good old Brownie, you dear!" she cried to the cat that was purring rapturously. "I'll never be afraid of you again as long as I live!"

The cat looked at her with speculative, blinking eyes; then, making a funny little sound in her throat, Lady Teaser sprang to the ground and disappeared, while the children excitedly discussed the fray.

"That was just to let old Snitch know he needn't go for *her* kittens the way he did for her mother, poor Calamity! . . . I'm glad she's taught him his lesson. . . . I—but just look there!"

From the direction of the shed came the little mother cat bringing in her mouth a tiny black object with curled-up pink paws that she laid tenderly at Ramona's feet. In two minutes she was back with another, and soon all three of her babies were blinking sleepily into Ramona's aston-

ished eyes. Then out flashed the proud little paw, tapping at the child's skirt, as much as to say, "Just look who's here!"

"The darlings!" cried Ramona, snatching them up and cuddling them close. Then, as Lady Teaser began climbing trustfully up to join her kittens, they all stood tense. Up, up, she went, and Ramona, though pale, stood her ground. Gathering the entire group in her arms, she said tremblingly but determinedly:

"I'm just going to love cats the rest of my life!"

Tears came into the eyes of some of the children, but Shirley as usual saved the day with her impromptu:

"Oh, dear Lady Teaser!

She's learned how to please her.

Ramona Cardeza

Will love her evermore!"

CHAPTER X

THE HAUNTED ATTIC

THERE comes the sun!" exclaimed Madge excitedly. "Oh, goodity of goodities! Now we can have the surprise picnic for Shirley. I'm sure it'll make her forget she couldn't go with us on the Sunday-school picnic because she dropped that old hammer on her foot!"

"Open and shet,
Bound to be wet!"

croaked Dicey.

"That's so! It's clouding up again!" and Madge flattened her snub nose against the window pane.

"But we just can't waste all those goodies I saw Dicey putting into the picnic baskets this morning," moaned Polly the plump.

"Daddy and Motherree will make it right somehow," said Dee Dee confidently. "I saw them laughing together just before Shirley coaxed to ride into Sharon with Daddy."

"There's always something perfectly splen-

diferous happens after they laugh and counsel together," Madge exulted. "How about it, Motherree?" as Mrs. Deane entered the room.

"We've thought of an original way of having the picnic in spite of the rain," she said, smiling. "But first you must wash the breakfast dishes for Dicey, because she has been working since sunrise to make dainty things for your baskets. If some of you can manage to dispose of Shirley—Father seems to be sending her back because it is beginning to rain again—I'll tell you what it is before you go out in the kitchen."

"That's easy enough," said Madge. "Oh, Shirley," she called to her sister, "if I do your share of the dishes, will you find my garter I lost upstairs?" As Shirley nodded and disappeared, Madge added with satisfaction: "That settles her for half an hour. I know she'll find the garter in two minutes, and then she'll pore over those old magazines she's got poked behind the rafters and thinks I don't know about; and then, when she's sure we've got the dishes all done, she'll come down and offer to help—just see if she don't!"

"Oh, Madgie!"

"Well, if you don't believe it, wait and see!"

"What's the plan, Motherree?" asked Doris.

"Have any of you noticed the scuttle on the north roof?"

"The scuttle to nowhere? Yes, we've often

wondered about it. It must light a closed attic, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Deane smiled assent. "How would you like to have your picnic this afternoon in a closed attic? You'd have to go up to the roof on an outside ladder and draw your food baskets up by strings, you know."

"It would be the excitingest picnic I ever attended!" exclaimed Madge, thrilled by the novelty. And then her face suddenly fell as she asked, "But we'll have to give it up till Shirley's foot is all well, wouldn't we? She never could limp up a ladder."

"Father's thought of a way," said Mrs. Deane, "but it means that you can't have the picnic till he comes home. He's going to invite Mr. Norton's orphan grandchildren, who are visiting in Sharon this week, to come out in the late afternoon. Shirley has taken such a fancy to them that I am sure it would please her to drive in with me and ask them to come back with us. She won't know that she is inviting them to a surprise party for herself."

"What!" exclaimed the dismayed Madge as her mother hurried away. "You don't suppose they're going to invite those Stuckupions to a party in an empty garret! That'll just take all the fun out of everything!"

"Why don't you like them, Madgie?"

"Because they don't like me—and they are not very gamesome and—they laughed at me the other day when I just pulled up my stocking—and when I tried not to mind and told them about Lady Teaser's new kittens, they just said: 'What a curious child that one is with the bristling hair!' *Curious*, mind you! As if I belonged to a menag-zoorie! Besides," she moaned tragically, "Shirley's always playing up to tony folks, and when they're around, she treats her family like dirt under her feet. You all know she does."

Madge touched a sore point there, but Dicey ruthlessly cut short all further discussion with, "Well, if you ain't allus hauling up yore stocking, I don't know who is. And if you won't take time to slick down yore hair a-bristling up behind yore round comb, you mustn't mind them as laughs at it. If they ain't no picnic till afternoon, you all clar out of my kitchen now and play in the barn."

Just then, Shirley, temporarily crippled by the falling hammer, limped into the kitchen and, looking around with feigned surprise, said, "What! Dishes all done already?"

"You knowed well enough they was," replied Dicey. "You amuse this here raft of youngwuns in the barn now till dinner time, and I'll tell you all a secret this afternoon."

"All right," agreed Shirley quickly. "I'll tell you children a story I've just been reading."

"Wait for me!" shrieked Madge scurrying behind them after slipping on the retrieved garter. "I'll act it for you as soon as she tells it." And with the Stuckupion grievance forgot, they ran between the raindrops out to the barn, playing there contentedly till Dicey rang the dinner bell.

After dinner they had their usual "quiet hour." Whether it was because they had played so vigorously all the morning, or because of the soothing drumming of the rain on the roof, all the Deanelets—even the restless Madge—fell fast asleep. So long was their unaccustomed nap that they did not know that Mr. Deane had come home early and had been working, as always, to give the charm of novelty to their good-time parties.

When there came a lull in the downpour, he placed a ladder against the side of the house. "Now then! Who goes first to the closed attic?"

"Me! Oh, me! I choose to go first!" Then remembering her manners, Madge said, "Since it's a picnic for Shirley, I suppose she has the first right. Where is Shirley, anyhow?"

"Mother took Shirley and Ramona with her to get the Norton girls. While they are driving them out behind old Manydays, we can get things all ready without Shirley's smelling a mouse."

"Then, Dicey, you go," urged Madge. "You're the oldest."

"No, you don't get me on no such contraption

as that thar ladder! I doesn't go to none of yore parties unless I climbs stairs. I gits things ready, but I doesn't h'ist them. You jest hand-over up thet ladder, you Madge, with this rope wropped round yore wrist, and when you gits to the top, let it down, and I'll tie the baskets onter it. See?"

In a jiffy, the rope was dangling from the open scuttle, and basket after basket of picnic fittings and eatables were swung into place by the gleeful Madge. Then came her sisters, followed by Mr. Deane with Lisbeth on his shoulder.

Such "Oh's" and "Ah's" when they were at last in the mysterious room which they had so often wondered about when gazing at it from the outside! For they found within not a mere bare windowless chamber lighted by a scuttle, but a veritable little grove simulating their longed-for woodsy picnic. For, while they had slept, Father had stood little evergreen trees in the corners, had heaped the center of the floor with new-mown hay, covered it with a tablecloth, and put little mounds of pine boughs around it to serve as seats.

"Quick, now! Let's set the table before Mother gets back with Shirley, Ramona, and the Stuck-upions!" cried Madge, diving into the baskets at which Polly was already sniffing.

Father, meanwhile, let down a pail for Will Walter to fill with drinking water and hauled it

up hand over hand. In a few minutes, the boy followed it up with some barn lanterns and hung them in the corners of the room. He had helped, too, with the tree boughs and hay, but as nothing would induce him to attend a "just girls' party," Dicey had filled a small basket of goodies especially for him. Peering down upon them from the skylight opening, he was complacently chewing on some of his Dixie cookies, to the consternation of Polly of the insatiable appetite.

Just as he was about to disappear down the ladder, he noticed the lid of a wooden seat against the wall at the end of the room, mysteriously rising up. In a second, Shirley's curls were framed in the opening, and soon Ramona's big black eyes were beside her. Giggling at the consternation of those already in the attic—for once tongue-tied with amazement—they ducked in order to let the prim countenances of the Stuckupions appear in the opening. That broke the spell.

"Oh, how did you ever get there? . . . Let us help you over! . . . Come on in! . . . It's the most glorious picnic I ever heard of! . . . Where did you find that way to get here?" they all clamored while Father and Will slipped away down the ladder.

"Well," began Shirley importantly, "it seems that last week when Motherree was hanging up

things in the closet below, she noticed a streak of light above the top boards coming from she didn't know where and——"

"Oh!" wailed Polly, with an agonized glance at the outspread feast. "Can't you just as well tell us while we are eating?"

"Eat your own self, Polly, but not a mouthful for me till this mystery is solved!" declared Madge. "Do hurry on, Shirley!"

"Well, Mother showed the light streak to Father, who said that he remembered hearing when he was a boy that somewhere there was a secret chamber in the house where our great grandmother hid for weeks a Revolutionary soldier escaped from a British prison. She fed him till, one day, when she carried him a pie, she found he had disappeared—nobody knew how or where. Some people thought by the scuttle till they found it was hooked on the inside. You see," she concluded, "last week's wind storm must have blown the old scuttle off its hinges, and that's what made the streak of light that surprised Motherree."

"Did they ever hear more of the soldier? How did he find the way here?"

"Oh," yawned Shirley provokingly, combining her love of teasing with her desire to hold the key to all important situations. "I'll finish for desert. Let's have the picnic now."

So, seated around the floor table, they ate and drank and speculated on the drama that had been enacted in this very room a hundred years ago. Ramona produced a bag of candy, and the Stuck-upions a basket of red bananas and oranges.

"Oranges!" chirped Madge. "Whoever heard of oranges in summer time!" Then, in response to an exasperated look from her next older sister, "You just needn't glare at me, Shirley Deane! You know well enough you never tasted one in the summer time before!—But," leaping back to the day's sensation, "I just can't get that shut-up soldier out of my mind. Dee Dee, you make up a play called 'The Soldier's Bride,' and I'll act the bride."

"No, make it an opera, and I'll sing the soldier, dressed up in great-grandfather's colonial clothes!" said Shirley.

Meanwhile, Polly had lifted the lid of the bench through which the visitors had come. "I see a chair on a table down in the closet. Is that the way you ascended, Shirley?"

"Yes, Mother lifted me up part way, and the girls helped me scramble the rest of the way. You see, when Father began hunting that streak of light, he found when he slid a board back up there that there was space for a ladder, and as he climbed up, his head bumped open the lid of that seat, and here he was! He understood then how

the soldier had been fed, and also how runaway slaves were hidden here when escaping to Canada. I thought it was the greatest mystery I ever heard of, right in our own house, too! And I thought I was going to spring such a big surprise on you all, and then, when I clambered up here, here you all were waiting to surprise me with this lovely picnic!"

"That's just like Mother's blessedness," crowed Madge. "She's always planning to even all our shares of fun."

"I think you are just the richest family I ever knew," said Evelyn Norton suddenly. "Mildred and I have envied you so your father and mother and your good times, and now to think that you have a haunted attic and a soldier ghost!"

"You envy *us*?" exclaimed outright Madge. "Why, we're as poor as Job's turkeys, and you're rich enough to have a special room for baths, aren't you?"

"Of course," Shirley broke in hastily, as she cast an irritated glance at her sister. "Of course, Evelyn's and Mildred's uncle has a bathtub, and you have gas, too, in your French-roofed mansion, haven't you?"

"Ye-es," assented Mildred, "but what's that when we don't have any fun? We never have one bit of outdoor fun except when we visit Sharon. At our uncle's home in the city, we always have

to put on our best clothes and parade up and down with the governess, and we never once had any good times getting dirty. We'd gladly do without the honor of having the first bathtub in the city if we could have jolly times like this."

"I saw a real bathtub in a shop window once," said Polly. "It looked like a picture of a Roman sarcophagus."

"Br-r-r!" ejaculated Madge. "I think it would be awfully tombstone-y to get clean in a thing like that. Give me the old washtub in Dicey's warm kitchen! . . . What's the matter now, Shirley? Whenever any of us open our mouths to say anything before company, you always look as if we were going to disgrace the family."

"So would I like a washtub in Dicey's kitchen," laughed Mildred. "I think it would be great fun if it went with a ghost garret and a haunting mystery. I——"

Just then came a terrific bang that blew away the prop that was holding up the scuttle lid, and the windowless attic was in pitchy blackness.

"Oh, Oh! . . . It's a really-truly ghost! . . . I'm afraid! . . . I'm afraid!" cried some of the frightened children.

"We can't even grope our way out of this ghost trap!" wailed the Stuckupions.

"Nonsense!" said Dee Dee's calm voice. "There's nothing to be afraid of. Father will

come and light the lanterns as soon as it gets dark outdoors. He doesn't know the skylight's blown shut, or he'd do it now. We're so cosy and safe here, we'll just tell stories till he comes. Don't budge, anybody."

"All right," agreed Polly. "We'll stretch out by our places and play we're old Roman patriicians reclining at a banquet. Tell us again that story about the Whiskifriskies, Dee Dee."

"No," said Doris, as she cuddled the trembling Lisbeth close to her, "Ramona's company. Let's ask her to tell a story first."

"Very well," agreed Ramona who was a devoted admirer of Dee Dee's unselfish care of the sisterhood. "I'll tell you how the tortoise got the marks on his shell. Our old nurse in Tunis used to tell it to us whenever a turtle crossed our path. This is the way she always told it:

"Many hundreds of years ago—Allah alone knows how many centuries ago—there lived by the shores of the Mediterranean a tailor who made the most wondrous costumes in Tunis. Of cloths of gold and silver he made them for gala robes; and so exceedingly lovely were they that, from each order, he always clipped off a generous piece for himself. At first these snippets were merely samples which he displayed as souvenirs of the fine materials in which he had worked; and he used to hang them on his wall to show them off to

customers. But the more he worked with the rich tissues entrusted to him, the more he stowed away for himself, till, finally, he fashioned whole garments from the pieces he had cut and hidden away. His fame became so great because of the gorgeousness of his robes that he began to get greater riches from his thefts than from his earnings.

"Suddenly, by the will of Allah, he fell ill with a burning fever which cast him into a tormenting delirium. In this delirium, he seemed to be wrapped in a great flag of many colors, made up of all the pieces of material that he had stolen. Each kind would jiggle up to him and jeer at him as it danced on his nose, crying: 'You stole me! You stole me! You know you did!' So terrified was the tailor by this vision that he made a vow to Allah that if these teasing imps could be withdrawn and he could be restored to health, he would never, never, *never* again put aside for himself any of his customers' materials. So well did he keep his oath that for a hundred moons he resisted the temptation to possess himself of even the most beautiful embroideries.

"But one day, after he had become exceeding famous as the most artistic and economical tailor of North Africa, a merchant, traveling homeward on a camel from a far country, left at his shop the most marvelous piece of cloth in the world. It was woven of gold and silver, and was stiffly

embroidered with tiny shining mirrors and with seed pearls and with priceless gems. So dazzled was the tailor by its splendor that he hardly heard the merchant ordering him to fashion it into the finest of garments as a present for the Bey of Tunis.

"When the merchant had ridden away on his camel, the tailor reasoned thus with himself: 'One half of this material will I hide away for myself, for never have I seen goods like unto it. So rich is it that it was not among the pieces in my flag vision, so, of course, it was not covered by my oath.' In his heart of hearts, he knew that putting away the merchant's cloth would be stealing, no matter what excuse he might make to himself for doing it. Lifting up the shimmering stuff, he sheared off what he called his half, and, pressing it to his breast, he started for his old treasure cave.

"But he never reached it; for Allah, angered by his thievery, turned him into a tortoise. The next time we come across a tortoise, I will show you the gold of the stolen cloth shining on his shell."

"That's an entrancing story, Ramona," sighed Mildred. "I love it and you and everybody here in the dark."

"You don't love me. You said I was 'curious,'" sighed the aggrieved Madge.

"So you *are* curious," persisted Mildred. "That's your charm, Madgie, and I love you specially because you're so different."

"Oh, you *do*?" And the mollified Madge unclasped her hands from under her head and, fumbling in the dark, finally took a hand of the visitors on each side of her. "Since you don't think that I am a freak from the menagzoorie, I'll try not to call you Stuckupions any more. I'm sorry I made up such a horrid name for you."

"You promised us, Ramona, when we were driving over, to tell us the legend about that curious golden coin that you wear. Wouldn't it be a good time to tell us now?" asked Evelyn.

"Ah, yes, do, Ramona," coaxed Madge. "Dear little Whizzabeth is asleep here by Dee Dee, and Polly's big supper has made her sleepy, too; but the rest of us would love to hear it. Ramona's stories are always so full of magicness, aren't they, Shirley?"

Fearing to move around in the pitchy blackness, the children stretched themselves out to listen to another of their favorite stories. The rain that had been beating on the roof had now subsided to a musical patter, and Ramona, still sitting on the bench where the sudden darkness had caught her, began in her sweet voice with its slightly foreign accent, another of the Eastern tales which her

nurses had told her when her father had been consul in North Africa:

"Once upon a time, an Arab named Ben-Kassem was made a prisoner of war by the Christians, who carried him off to Spain and sold him as a slave to an old savant. Though faithful to his master, Ben-Kassem never ceased to lament the loss of his wife and children. Overhearing him moaning for them in the garden, his master, Alfonso, said to him one day: 'Ben-Kassem, thou hast served me so well that I am going to let thee earn thy liberty and return to the bosom of thy family, if thou wilt promise to do, on the fourth day after thy arrival, what I require of thee.'

"Bowling low, Ben-Kassem said, 'Speak, master, and thy will shall be done.'

"'Very well, take thy staff and join the band now setting out for Algiers whence thou camest. Stay four days with thy loved ones, and then proceed at once to the circular tomb twenty leagues without the city. When thou reachest it, read the scrip that I now place in thy sandal.'

"The tomb is still there, girls," said Ramona, for a moment dropping her story-telling manner. "I have often seen it. It is on a high hill and its base has a great many columns. I have often climbed the steps that go up from the circular part in a pyramid shape. At the entrance are a queer-looking lion and lioness that are carved in the

stone and guard the little door into the vaulted chamber.

"Well, when Ben-Kassem reached these stone animals, he slipped off his sandal and began reading the scrip that Alfonso, his master, had put inside. 'Burn this scroll of paper in a brazier,' it said, 'and be not astonished at anything that may happen.' The slave thereupon did exactly as he was bid, and no sooner had the flames touched the magic paper than the tomb burst open and thousands of gold and silver pieces came forth from it in clouds and flew over the sea to Spain.

"Ben-Kassem fell on his knees and gathered up a few of them in his burnous to keep as witch charms, and his great-granddaughter, who was my little brother's nurse, gave this one to me.

"But, alas! as soon as Ben-Kassem hid the coins, the stream of money ceased to flow; the charm was broken and the tomb shut up tight. Three times he struck it three blows till the ghost of a woman, appearing on the summit, cried in a loud voice, 'Alloula! Alloula! Come to my help!'

"The first time that he knocked thrice, a grisly——"

Just then three loud knocks sounded on the side of the attic wall opposite Ramona. "Let me in!" cried a woman's voice without.

Now the children were terrified, indeed! Oh, *where* was Daddy? They dared not stir in the

inky darkness. The Stuckupions and Shirley began to weep, and even Madge and Doris were trembling with excitement.

Again came three knocks. Again a woman's voice cried, "Let me in! Let me in!" This time the panic-stricken children could see a light moving behind a crack in the splintered wall.

"A ghost! . . . A spook! . . . A witch!"

"Oh, it must be the really-truly soldier ghost this time!" cried Madge enthusiastically. "And he's bringing his light to find out how we ever got into his old quarters. If Father was here now, we'd soon learn how he vanished. Why! . . . There's Father now! . . . I hear his voice somewhere outside!"

Sure enough! A wooden panel in the wall boarding was pushed aside, and there were Father with a lantern, Will Walter with a rusty sword, and Dicey with a bucket of ice cream.

"I done tole you all that when I done clum' up here, it wouldn't be by no shackling ladder," said she, grinning triumphantly.

"But how did you get here if you didn't come up by the ladder or the closet?" they all clamored at once, rubbing their eyes to get used to the glow from the barn lanterns that Father was lighting.

"Marse Jawge'll tell you all about it while I serves the dessert. Wake up, Polly; here's a bit more stuffing fer you." And she scooped a big

ladle of frozen custard from the bucket she was carrying on her arm.

While the children were enjoying this unexpected treat, Mr. Deane told them that, when standing the evergreens in the corners that afternoon, one of the trees had fallen heavily against the board wall, pushing a part of it back so that he could see that there was a space beyond.

"Upon closer examination," he continued, after taking the spoonful of cream that Whizzabeth, on his lap, wished to share with him, "I found that there was a trapdoor in the space. Lifting it up and fastening it back, I found an old stairway. Not daring to descend without a light, I went down the outside ladder and brought up one of the lanterns now hanging in the corners. Slowly, very slowly, I crept down the steps, and where do you think I came out?"

"I know! I know!" cried Madge. "In the skeleton closet!"

"Yes, in the walled-up corner of the cellar that for four generations has been known as 'the skeleton closet.' "

"And did you find any skeletons?" chorused the eight.

"No, nothing so gruesome, I am glad to say. But I did find these." And Mr. Deane took the rusty old sword from Will, and from his own pocket some brass buttons on a grimy string that

fell apart, causing the old buttons to roll away into the far corners of the attic.

"And does this clear up our Revolutionary romance?" asked Doris anxiously.

"Not entirely," replied her father. "But it throws a great deal of light on it. There used to be a rumor that perhaps it was a Tory hidden here, or even a Hessian who was the lover of a bound girl in the family. Someone in the household undoubtedly connived at his escape, letting him in the cellar way and out by the closet, or vice versa."

"Oh, I don't want him to be a horrid old Hessian, like our andirons, with a stiff high cap," protested Shirley.

"He might have worn a Revolutionary uniform as a disguise, though, at first, they had no regular uniforms; so he may have just ripped these buttons off his greatcoat and left his sword here so as to pass as an ordinary person if taken in an attempt to get through the lines. Or he may have been a Colonial ancestor who left his sword here till he could come back for it. He may have been frozen to death at Valley Forge and so never have come back, or he may have returned and found the place walled up. My grandmother never wanted us to open the cellar closet during her lifetime, dreading to find things even more horrible than skeletons. She always feared that the man might have been an escaped Hessian pris-

oner, enticed by the maid, who, perhaps, walled up the place in the cellar, thinking it a patriotic thing to do. If so, he must have tunneled his way out, for there is no skeleton there."

"You didn't tell us how you got out, Daddy," said Doris.

"As I was swinging the lanterns in the lower space at the foot of the steps, I discovered a place in the wall where the rough plastering seemed different, so I gave it a kick that caused much of it to crumble away. I worked enough loose to enable me to crawl out, and then, while you were all taking your nap, I knocked away the stuff filling what must have been the original doorway. I told Mother and Dicey and Will, who helped me to clear it out; and when it began raining again so hard, Dicey suggested bringing the dessert to you this way."

"No dessert ever had such a mysterious sauce," laughed Doris. "May we all go down that way, Daddy?"

"We cleans up fust," commanded Dicey. "Put all the scraps in these yere baskets. I'll tote the few dishes, and we'll pitch the room trimmings out of the scuttle."

"Ah, the hay's so sweet and the trees so pretty! Can't we keep them here, Daddy, to furnish the Haunted Attic, and turn it into our regular rainy-day room?"

"If Mother doesn't object. She is putting the twinnies to sleep now, so let's go down quietly. You go right to bed and dream about the soldier who stayed in this room, while I drive Evelyn and Mildred home to their grandfather's."

"But first, Daddy," pleaded Madge, "can't we go down by way of the spooky stairs that *he* used, and out through the skeleton closet?" Reading assent in her father's face she shrilled, "Just think of it! We'll be the first girls to set foot on these stairs for a hundred years! I choose to go first!"

"No, Madge, I'll go first with one lantern, and Dicey will bring up the rear with another, and Will will wait for us at the foot of the stairs with still another. Dee Dee, look after Lisbeth, and Madge and Mildred, carry the other lanterns. Now, all fall in line! I'll carry Shirley because her lameness might prevent her being sure-footed enough on these rough old stairs."

As the excited procession filed past Dicey, Shirley smiling triumphantly in her father's arms, the old colored woman muttered to herself, "Ain't that thar jest her luck to be the fust of the bunch to go down them hysterical stairs! From the time that thar Shirley was a year old, she has jest nachally reached out her hands and took the very best there was, and she just nachally will keep on a getting it all her born days!"

"Not if I know it, 'said a little voice."

"Who spoke thataway?" said Dicey peering down the shadowy stairway.

But no reply reached her. She could hear only the excited shrieks and squeals of the little band groping their way down to the cellar from the haunted attic.



CHAPTER XI

THE SERPENT ENTERS PARADISE

AS I sent around the notes myself, calling our first meeting here in the Haunted Attic," announced Madge in her most business-like manner, "I'll state the object at once."

"Better wait till Evelyn and Mildred Norton get here!" said Shirley. "I sent a note to them by Father, asking them to come out and spend the day."

"You *did*?" cried Madge taken greatly aback. "Why couldn't you have asked the rest of us if it would be convenient? You never do, and now I don't like to state the object when it's a strictly private matter."

"If you don't," teased Shirley with a toss of her curls, "I'll tell them you called them the Stuck-upions."

"I told them myself after I found out how folksy they were, and I told them, too, how sorry I was—but now——"

"Here they come," threatened Shirley. "If you dodge the real object of the meeting, whatever it was, I'll tell so's they'll never believe you're really-truly sorry."

"Well," began the discomfited chairman after sisters and guests had settled themselves expectantly, "I heard Daddy tell Motherree last night that he had received an offer of a position in the City Bank at a higher salary than he gets here, and he feared we ought to go back."

"Wouldn't it somehow cost more to live in the city?" queried practical Polly.

"Mother said that during the winter we would be much warmer in our little city house. It would cost a lot to make this dear old place as comfy in the winter, you know."

"Oh," wailed the chorus, "we'd just hate to have to go back to that stuffy little house!"

"What have you to suggest, Madgie? I know that you are hatching some kind of a plan or you'd never stop playing long enough to call us together," said Doris, twisting one of Lisbeth's ringlets over her fingers.

"Well, I've been thinking for some time that we girls never get a chance to be heroes and heroines like the boys and girls in our Sunday-school books, because they always did hard and noble things so as to pay off the mortgage. And Tuckaway House, you know, hasn't any mortgage on it. And when I woke up early this morning and lay there looking up at the rafters thinking how *awfully* we'd hate to leave it, it just popped into my head that maybe the cost of altering this house might be about as much as a mortgage, and so it would be just as noble of us to band ourselves together to pay off that as to pay off any old ordinary mortgage. So I slipped downstairs to talk it over with Dicey, the only person up."

"*She* wouldn't give you any encouragement," sniffed Shirley.

"Yes, she did, too—in a way. She chuckled and chortled and chuckled some more. Then she reached up and got down that darling old Toby jug she keeps on the top shelf. 'I'll give this yere,' she said, 'to the youngwun that puts the most in it. You-all will have to fill it jam full though, to git enough to pay for comforting up this yere old house.'

"So, now," continued Madge eagerly, "each of us must earn something separately for Toby, and then we'll earn something all together with

a fair, or an entertainment, or something. If the Hutchinson family could earn a living going around singing 'Tenting To-night on the Old Camp Ground,' I don't see why the Deane family, with Shirley's singing, and my reciting, and Dee Dee's story-writing, and Polly's drawing can't give a play or an opera or something. Now, here's squatty old Toby," she wound up breathlessly, producing the jug from her pinafore pocket, "sitting here in his knickerbockers and brave blue coat and broad-brimmed hat. Who'll be the first to put something into his funny fat tummy?"

"Father brought me something last night that we were going to keep a secret till Mother's birthday," ventured Doris diffidently, "but I'm sure that he wouldn't mind my taking you into the secret"; and reaching over to the antique jug placed on the floor in the middle of the ring, she slipped into it a pink strip of paper.

"What's that?" shouted the group.

"It's called a 'check,' and it's worth three dollars, Daddy says."

"Where did you find it?"

"I earned it. *St. Nicholas* offered a three-dollar prize for the best story by one of its subscribers. I don't think any other children could have sent any in, for my little 'Whiskifriskies' took the prize."

"Oh, how perfectly jolly!" exulted Madge. "Come on now, all of you! Shirley, why don't you finish up and try to sell that little poem of yours beginning

" 'There's a Quaker Lady carpet
Down by our pasture lot,
A sweep of dainty lavender——' "

"I sha'n't try to *earn* anything for it," interrupted Shirley in a superior manner, "because I heard old Mr. Norton say to Father that it offended his esthetic sense to think of a woman earning her living. So I made up my mind then and there that I'd never do it."

"What's your assthetic sense that makes you so toplofty?" demanded Madge bluntly.

"I don't know—exactly," Shirley hesitated. "But I know that I'd never stoop to earning money."

She had been rather appalled at the shameless way in which Madge had dragged out the family skeleton of poverty and rattled it around before the sympathetic eyes of the visitors that she had been so anxious to impress; so she seized this opportunity to make a theatrical counter stroke before them. She, too, wished to stay on at

Tuckaway House, because she realized shrewdly that with its haunted attics and other charms it would make a far more favorable impression on the rich Nortons than could the Deanes' shabby little city home in its undesirable neighborhood. She, therefore, quickly decided to pose as one who makes tremendous sacrifices, though disdaining to toil for filthy lucre.

"Since I can't bring myself to earn any money," she concluded, "I'll give my birthday gold piece that was to buy me a blue watered silk sash." And opening the big locket that she always wore around her neck, she took out her precious coin and dropped it ringing into the Toby jar.

This act made a far deeper impression on her guests than any number of sashes could have made. Mildred sympathetically slipped her dainty hand into Shirley's, while Evelyn said shyly: "I'm sorry I've only this month's pocket money with me, but I'll put this in, and we'll save next month's, won't we, Mildred?"

"Oh, no!" protested Doris as she saw a folded bill slipped behind Toby's expansive waistcoat. "No, indeed! I'm sure Father and Mother would never, never, *never* want us to take money from people outside of the family!"

"Dee Dee's just right!" agreed Shirley, fishing out the bill. "It's awfully good of you, Evelyn, and we're awfully much obliged, but it isn't your

mortgage, you know, and so you mustn't do what our family ought to do."

To her astonishment, Evelyn and Mildred looked at each other as if they were going to cry. "But we thought you were going to take us into your family," faltered Mildred. "We—we thought it would be such fun to do things with you when we haven't any family of our own."

"*Please* let it stay," coaxed Evelyn. "We haven't anything to spend it for but candy, and we're just sick of candy!"

"We'll let it stay, then, till we can ask Mother," agreed Doris, "but I'm sure she will think it best not."

"Who else now?" urged Madge.

"I'll give my five thentheth," volunteered Lisbeth.

"You can't, Whizzie," teased Shirley. "Your five senses are hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and feeling."

"I didn't mean *thothe* five thentheth," protested the lisping child, with rising color. "I mean *thethe* five thentheth," holding out five big copper cents, the first she had ever earned.

"Shirley, *don't*," pleaded Madge ruefully. "Don't, or you'll be as mean as I was about 'the lantn went thib.'"

"Dee Dee's thought of a way for you to earn

more five-cent pieces," interposed Doris, the wheel-greaser, to the distressed little sister. "Dee Dee'll show you how to make bundles of paper fagots, and perhaps you can sell them for lots of five-cent pieces to jingle into Toby. Won't that be just lovely?"

Kissing away the threatened April shower, Doris asked:

"How much are you going to give, Madge?"

"Can't tell till I've earned it," replied Madge soberly. "I haven't a penny now, you know, but—I saw an advertisement in the *Sharon Clarion* where somebody offered five dollars to anybody that could think up a way to rid his cherry tree of robins—and I have an idea, and I think I'll try for it."

"I think it must have been the same individual," drawled Polly, "who offered a prize for keeping the robins out of his strawberry bed. I think I'll try for that."

"'Twon't do one bit of good, Polly. I tried to keep them out of Doctor Ward's early patch last month. I kept a pile of stones handy, and every so often I'd shy one into the middle of the bed so's not to hit the dear things themselves. And would you believe it, they just hopped a little way off and then came right back again, pecking at the biggest, reddest berry they could find, and cocking their

heads to one side, and rolling their saucy, beady eyes at me as much to say: 'Throw another, Madgie dear. We don't mind stones a bit. Indeed, we rather like them.' No, Polly, my way of scaring them out of the cherry tree is going to be easier. You just see if I don't win that prize!"

"I move we adjourn," said Shirley. "It may be lovely and spooky in a haunted attic on a dark, stormy night, but it's awfully hot up here on a midsummer day."

"All right!" assented Madge glibly. "It's moved, seconded, and carried that we all adjourn. I choose to take old Toby down to Dicey, 'cause she's Treasurer of our Home Sweet Home League. Let's call it the H. S. H. for short. Won't she be surprised though to hear all this rustling and clinking inside of the old codger?"

Early the following morning, the Tuckaway House neighborhood was startled and mystified by a prolonged bell ringing.

Cling, clang, clingety, clang, clang!

It couldn't be a fire. It wasn't a peddler or sharpener man! What was it?

Following the sound, the hurriedly dressed Deanelets found Madge under Doctor Ward's great cherry tree, sending peal after peal from a bell that she had tied in the upper branches.

"I've hit it this time," she cried to her sisters. "All those redbreasts were in the tree when I began."

A bevy of robins were flying around and above the tree, protesting and chattering and eyeing the barefooted little girl who had startled them from their morning meal of late luscious cherries.

"I found out that it was Doctor Ward's advertisement in the *Clarion*, and he says that the birds would be welcome to all they could really eat, but," dropping the bell rope in her excitement, "but they just take a peck out of the nicest and throw them down. See! I've got the best of them now," she called triumphantly to Doctor Ward, coming slowly down the pathway to find out what was the din that had disturbed his early morning work. "They're all gone now. My surprise bell—my! what a time I had making it stick up there!—has scared them all away!"

Even as she spoke, a half-eaten cherry fell on her little snub nose. They all looked up to find the twittering birds happily resuming their interrupted meal.

"Oh, the owdacious things!" And again the bell pealed its warning. Again the birds fluttered away, and again they stole back, one venturesome robin even perching right on the very top of the bell. Then Madge gave another despairing tug. Cling, clang! Clingety, clang, clang!

"I did so want to do it up in true curfew-shall-not-ring-to-night style by holding on to the clapper. You know how it goes:

" 'Out, far out she swung!
The city seemed a speck of light below!'

But it's no use," she concluded mournfully. "I couldn't get the big farm-hand bell up there, and they don't seem to mind this old dinner bell except when it's ringing." And she jerked the rope vigorously. "Why, I'd have to stay here dinging it all day long! Just look at them now!"

While she was speaking, the flock had flown down to the strawberry bed, debating whether it would be worth while to begin pecking the almost ripe berries.

" 'Cherries first!' has evidently been their motto," said Doctor Ward ruefully. "I wouldn't have minded their loss so much; but I did hope to save those strawberries, for they are a special late variety that a friend of mine is trying to introduce as a kind of ever-bearing fruit, and it would have given me great pleasure to endorse their good qualities from my own experience."

"No use!" croaked Madge. "Each bird would have to have a special watchdog. Better give it up, Polly."

" 'Give it up' isn't in my vocabulary," said pains-

taking Polly. "If Doctor Ward has no objections I'd like to try out something. I suppose it must have been your anonymous notice in the *Clarion*, Doctor Ward?"

"Yes, in desperation I tried advertising a prize just because I am so anxious to raise this special crop of strawberries for my friend. The berries are so unusually large and fine-flavored. I wouldn't permit old Josh to try shooting at the birds; for I wouldn't want to hurt the robins after Louise has tamed so many of them and brought them here in such flocks—especially now while she is still in the sanitarium. I presume that I might as well make up my mind that all my red crops are foredoomed to failure! Last year I tried having old Josh put mosquito netting over them. But the winds loosened and tore the net so that the birds just crawled underneath and pecked every one. Besides, the netting cost almost as much as the crop was worth. Give it up, children. I'm beaten."

As he walked moodily back to his study, an irate Dicey tramped indignantly across the road. "You all come home to brekfus'," she shouted. "Somebody's done disappeared the old bell and made me traipse over here after you."

Madge promptly changed her mind about treating the robins to a farewell toll, dropped the rope, and scampering over to the old colored woman

said: "Poor dear Toby's bound to have a tummy-ache this morning, Dicey. I had planned to give him such a nice prize breakfast, and now I have only——"

"A sense of defeat," finished Shirley.

Two days afterward, the same group was hurriedly assembled in Doctor Ward's garden, called there by the frightened cries of old Josh. No clanging of bells this time, but the same excited flurry among the robins. Having done all the damage possible to the cherry crop—with their bright eyes meanwhile on the strawberries reddening in the intense summer sun—they had this morning decided to transfer their energies to the ripened berries. So they had flown down in great flocks, then had flitted away in consternation, and were now eyeing the plot, chattering noisily but making no effort to return to it.

Polly started to explain the reason to Doctor Ward, more irate than ever at this second disturbance. "Last week," she said, "I was reading a story about the way that some serpents charm birds. It was illustrated by a picture showing a great snake with its head erect and broadened out like a hood, ready to strike at a poor bird so charmed that it just couldn't fly away. And while Madge was ringing her bell day before yesterday,

I kept wishing I could charm the robins away without hurting them. And just then I happened to spy lying by the well sweep that old long, leather hose that you brought out from Hartley when you moved here, Doctor Ward. I heard Will say that old Josh had tried to rig it up with the well water, but of course couldn't do it."

As Josh with his eyes fairly popping out of his head began edging closer to her, she continued: "It looked like such a headless old boa constrictor lying there that it set me to thinking up some way of making it look like a really-truly one. I thought you wouldn't mind, Doctor Ward, if I cut each side of one end just a little way so as to make its head flat. Then, as soon as it was light yesterday morning, I slipped over here and made two slits in one end and propped it up about a foot from the ground and stuck two big red-headed pins in for eyes. I tried to paint its tongue with the only red water-color paint I had, but it wouldn't stick. Then I tried to sew a bit of red flannel on, but it didn't suit me, nor did the red chalk that I smeared on, for I knew it wouldn't be permanent. So I pulled out the pins and washed off the chalk and gave Daddy a shinplaster to buy me a little vermilion oil paint. He was so understanding not to ask any questions, and last night he slipped it into my hand without anybody's seeing it."

"Why didn't you leave the pins in?" demanded Madge.

"Because I was afraid I might not succeed, and I didn't want any of you to see it before it was finished. So, this morning, I tried to drag the great long thing over here. Oh, oh! how heavy it was! I just had to ask Will to help me drag it. Even the two of us would never have managed it if it hadn't been in sections! And just as the sun came up, we got it to the strawberry bed, and we laid it, you see, along the outer edge of all four sides. Will's aunt screamed for him, so I finished it alone. I tied the head end to the steel that we sharpen knives on, and drove the steel into the ground so as to make the head erect like the picture. Then I again stuck in the red-headed pins for eyes in the flattened head, and painted rings around them and a red tongue sticking out. Then I hid in the lilac bushes where I could watch without the robins seeing me. Otherwise, I could not have been sure whether it was I or the boa constrictor that was keeping them away. I had been crouching there a long time, and not one bird had ventured in, when Josh came along and was so scared he made the rumpus that brought you all here."

"Oh, goodness!" exclaimed Madge generously. "You're lots smarter than I am, Polly."

"I am inclined to think," observed Doctor Ward

slowly, "that my precious little strawberry patch will be safe, or the birds would ere this have overcome their awe of Polly's charming boa constrictor. It seems a very crude and childish device, but it may work. Of course, it is too soon to decide yet; but if by the end of the week my beautiful berries are still unpecked, the prize shall be yours, my dear."

Every sunrise that week found Polly on guard. Sometimes the old serpent looked a little lop-sided and weather-beaten, especially after a shower; but Polly always straightened him up firmly, once renewed the paint and always examined the luscious fruit.

"Not a single peck!" she exulted. "The dear old charmer looks as awful as ever, and Doctor Ward has already gathered more than enough berries to insure the success of his experiment."

CHAPTER XII

UPS AND DOWNS

WILLIAM EDWARD WALTER, the boy next door, had disappeared. There was no doubt about it! His cranky old aunt said that he had not come in for supper; his bed had not been slept in, and he had not turned up for breakfast. What had become of him?

Suspecting that the sulky lad was badly treated at home and knowing that he was very unpopular at school, the neighbors feared that he had run away or, worse still, had done himself some serious injury; so bands of men were now scouring the countryside and dragging the ponds. Even Dicey had gone on a still hunt down by the river before joining Mrs. Deane in Sharon, where a photograph of Ramona was to be taken for her mother in Spain, and those of the twins were to be taken as a Christmas surprise for Father.

So the five remaining Deanelets, sitting under the big, hollow sycamore overshadowing the turnstile at one end of the yard, were discussing the mysterious disappearance in awed tones, fretting that they were not allowed to join the country-

wide search party, and too restless to amuse themselves with their customary gusto.

"Let's make up epitaphs about him!" suggested Madge. "Here goes!"

"Little Bill
Took a pill,
Then he cried
Till he died."

"Mine's better," flashed Shirley.

"Here lies our dear friend Walter!
He's met his death by a halter."

"I don't think it's nice," expostulated the gentle Dee Dee, "to joke about it that way. For all we know he may be lying truly dead somewhere, and we ought to forget all his grouchiness and bossiness."

"You just say that," teased Shirley, "because he gave you his chewing-gum package with the solid brass ring inside that Father had to have filed off your puffed-up finger!"

"But he didn't know that it was brass and would poison me," defended Dee Dee.

"Well, you said yourself," persisted Shirley, "that he's turned out the disappointingest Laurie you ever knew when you found out he was always

listening to us and jeering at us from the tree-tops."

"Yes, when we first moved here," admitted Dee Dee slowly, "I thought perhaps he was going to be our Laurie, just as that other boy was to the Little Women. Sometimes I think it's in him yet. But anyway, just because he hasn't yet, there's no use in making nonsense epitaphs about him. I just wish we could do something for him.—What's that noise?"

Five startled girls jumped away from the tree from whose depths came a weird moan as though from some imprisoned dryad.

"Ghosts!" shrieked Shirley.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Madge beating a lively tattoo on the bark. "What's making all that rumpus in our hollow tree?"

"Me!" came a half-smothered reply.

"Who's me?"

No answer.

"I'm going to find out!" and putting a bench under the lowest bough, Madge swung herself up on it and climbed like a cat to the point where she could peer down into the dark hollow.

"Nothing here!" she cried. "Oh, yes, there is, too! I see something that looks like a colored boy wriggling 'way down there. Who are you, anyway?" she demanded.

"Will Walter," replied a surly voice.

"Oh, girls, it's the lost boy! Let's rescue him!" and she scrambled hastily down to hold counsel with her sisters.

After a brief whispered conference, they all hurried away, returning with whatever each could snatch up to help her neighbor out of his sorry plight.

Polly came back lugging a big coil of rope. Shirley and Madge were tugging out the porch table. Dee Dee had a basket and pail, and little Elizabeth was dragging along a ball of string.

Putting the table close to the tree, the oldest girls clambered up on it.

"Let's put the ladder down to him!"

"The hole's too narrow! Can't you see he's 'most wedged in there?" Then Madge called down to the prisoner: "Isn't there some soft place in the side where you could get a footing, and take hold of our hands reaching down to you, and so climb up?"

"No, goosie! Don't you s'pose if there had been I'd a climbed out last night, and not stayed here cold and starved? You girls won't be strong enough to haul me up, no matter what you do."

"Yes, we will, too! We'll find a way somehow. Don't give up the ship!" Madge called down in her best curfew-shall-not-ring-to-night manner.

"First, I'm going to let this down to him," said Dee Dee quietly placing the bench on top of the

table and clambering up. "I've brought him some milk and some bread and cheese. He must be half sick with hunger." And tying Elizabeth's string to the pail, she began slowly sending the provisions down to the famished boy.

"'Twill only make more avoirdupois for us to haul up," protested the practical Polly.

"Oh, a pound or two won't make any difference if we can get him up at all," and Dee Dee continued paying out the string.

"I know what we can do next!" And Madge's keen eye wandered across the road. "We can pour down all that sand heap that Doctor Ward has had dumped out there to mend his walk. Let's form a bucket brigade and pour it down into the hollow so's Will can keep standing higher all the time till he's where we can reach down and yank him out!"

"I guess we'll *have* to try the sand first and see how high up it brings him," assented Polly. "For we never could rope him and haul him up from that far down. I wish, though, we dared consult Doctor Ward since he's the only man around. But as Father told us *never* to interrupt him, I suppose we can't."

So, for one long and weary hour, they trudged back and forth, toiling with their heavy pails, little and big, to the table where Shirley lifted and

dumped the sand into the hollow tree to the tune of, "Shut your eyes! Duck your head! Here it comes!"

"It's running down inside my collar! It's nearly smothering me! It's scratching my skin something awful!" came wailing up from below.

"Never mind that!" retorted the imperturbable Shirley, overturning another bucket. "Just be glad you can step up a little smitch higher each time."

Although by four o'clock the last bit of sand had been scraped up and poured into the hollow, the dismayed carriers found that their poor neighbor was still several feet below their reach.

"We'll just have to try to haul him up ourselves," said Madge in desperation. "Here," tossing down the rope, "make a loop in the end of this, Will, and get a good grip on it, and we'll all pull with all our might."

"It won't be a bit of use that way," protested Polly. "We're not strong enough to budge him, and we'll only frazzle the rope sawing it back and forth on the sharp edges of the hole. We ought to have a pulley, and there isn't any here."

But Madge's insistent leadership won the day. Many a time her madcap ideas pushed Polly's practical ones out of the way, even though they were later brought into use.

"I've got it!" And Madge pounced upon another contrivance. "We'll fasten the rope end to the turnstile, and as we all push round together, it's bound to raise him up. Take off your shoes and coat," she called down to Will, "so's to make yourself as light as you can."

"I can't bend down to reach my shoes, but perhaps I can manage to work my sweater off over my head."

After tossing down the rope for Will to arrange around himself as best he could, they swarmed up the tree like sailors up a mast and passed the other end over a deep crotch in the tree, above the hollow. Then came the job of attaching the dangling end securely to the turnstile. How they worked! They tugged at the stiff rope and scraped the skin off the inside of their hands, bracing a foot against the stile-post as they struggled to tighten the clumsy knots, hanging on to them with all their weight, and testing their strength in every possible way.

"There! Now it's strong enough to pull an ox!" panted Madge. "Everybody take her place in an arm of the stile, and when I say, 'Go,' all push together with all your might as if—as if—you were—shoving the ark off of Ararat! Ready, Will?"

"All ready," came the answer from inside the tree.

"Ready, girls? All right, then—GO!"

At first their combined efforts seemed to make no impression. Then slowly, very slowly, the rope began to twist a little. No one dared to waste a breath in talking, but five pairs of anxious eyes were fastened on the top of the hollow. Puffing and gasping, they pushed patiently on. Was that something coming to the top? No, it wasn't. . . . Yes, it was! . . . Hooray! No . . . of course it wasn't! . . . Another shove now—and then—flop!

Lisbeth began to cry at the top of her lungs. The boy in the tree was indulging in howls and unmentionable words; and four breathless, scarlet-faced girls were confronting one another in bewilderment.

“What happened?”

“Oh, I don't know!” and Madge's face flushed more deeply with disgust. “No place for the slack, I s'pose or—or—something—but I know now!” And the weather-vane child swung around with enthusiasm to a new idea. “We'll try winding the rope on the grindstone; iust turn the handle and wind him right out!”

“Well, I know *I* won't,” objected Polly stubbornly. “The rope wouldn't stay on, and the grindstone'd jump all over the place. And I'll never push or pull like that again when I'm sure that it won't do one bit of good.”

“Perhaps the turnstile may never haul him all

the way out," admitted Madge, "but if we try it just once more, I've thought of another way for him to get himself out the rest of the way. Dee Dee, you and Shirley help me lay the ladder across those two limbs nearest to the top of the hole. Polly, don't be so poky, and fetch me the old horse collar, quick, that's hanging on a nail in the barn," and as Polly hesitated, "Ah, go on, that's a good girl!"

It was no easy job to get the heavy ladder in place, but a summer of tree climbing had made these children lithe and muscular; and sympathy and determination did the rest. Soon the dilapidated horse collar was dangling from the heavy, home-made ladder rung and swinging not far from the hole-top. And then, to make assurance doubly sure, Madge fastened a short rope, with a long loop at the end, to another rung.

"There now!" and she surveyed her work with satisfaction. "When we all get him just so high as he was before, he can grab that rope loop and swing one foot into the collar, and the other over a ladder rung, and pull himself up on it like the trapeze boys in the circus."

"But I tell you I won't push that turnstile again! It didn't really budge him an inch," insisted Polly. "If we were only strong enough, we could just have Will take hold of the rope, thrown over a

strong rung of the ladder, and then all of us pull together on it, hand over hand, like sailors hauling on a rope. But I'm sure we're not strong enough."

"Oh, yes, we are!" whooped Madge, eager to regain the leadership at any cost, and quickly taking the rope off the turnstile. "Here goes the rope! Come along, now! Heave ho, my hearties!"

They heaved and they ho-ed, but not one whit could they budge the heavyweight in the hollow.

"I don't see why Will doesn't suggest something himself," said Shirley looking ruefully at her skinned hands. "He's generally so good on the boss."

"I've feared all along that he must be sick," said Doris anxiously.

"Well," announced Polly, "I've decided upon the only way we girls can get him out. I've given in to Madge all along, but now you've got to let me be captain this time, if we're to put it through."

Polly's quiet confidence won the day. "If we tie the rope to old Jackhorse, that big log over there," she explained, "and start it rolling down to that rock across the road, it will wind the rope around itself as it rolls, and that will be bound to haul Will up."

Jackhorse had been lying there long before the Deanes had come to Tuckaway House. While

one end of the great log had been resting on a huge stump, the children had had many a lively game astride Jackhorse or sliding down his back. Calling to the boy to let go of the rope, Polly passed it over the top end of the log, then through the hollow space underneath, over the log again, through the hollow again, so making a complete coil of rope around the log.

"Now," she said, "we'll have to scoop a place underneath till we can work the coil of rope down under to its middle."

Her sisters dug with such will that it wasn't long before Polly had the twice-wrapped rope around the middle of the log. Laying the short end at one side, she said:

"I'll hold on to that loose end when Jackhorse starts to roll, and keep pulling so's to keep the coil tight around the log."

Tying the other end, with her usual thoroughness, in a strong, well-made loop, she passed it up over the smooth crotch of the sycamore and slipped it down to Will.

"Put your foot in that loop," she called, "and get a good grip with your hands on the upper part of the rope! Now, the next thing is to get Jackhorse started." And Polly tugged at a fence rail to stick in the hollow under the middle of the log.

"That will make it roll down to the big rock across the road. I'll hold this rope end taut while

you four pry with all your might by pulling down the other end of the rail."

Jackhorse was speedily loosed from the bed where he had long lain so comfortably, and began his lazy roll down the slight incline. Polly didn't dare take her eyes off the loose end on which she was pulling to keep it from slipping, but the others soon saw Will's head and shoulders jerked suddenly into view, and a bleeding hand clutching at the rope loop still dangling from the ladder. Kicking off his foot loop, the boy hung there a moment inert, his face drawn with pain. At first he seemed too weak or too dazed to attempt anything further, and Madge was about making another suggestion when he swung one leg into the dangling horse collar. His other foot, as the collar swayed, caught on the round of the ladder, and painfully, weakly—the terrified children holding their breath in consternation—Will made the ladder and dropped limply to the table and then to the ground.

At sight of his pallid, grimy, scratched and bruised face, Lisbeth's cries burst forth again, and the others hurried to help him.

"Oh, we're so sorry you are hurt! . . . We must have banged you around awfully! . . . Let us help you home! . . . You're sick, aren't you?"

"Yes, no! . . . I'm all right now," and he

stood up unsteadily, shivering from head to foot. "Where's my sweater?" he asked with chattering teeth. "Oh, yes, in the tree yet. . . . I'll go get another. . . . I——"

And in spite of their protests, unaided, he shambled shakily homeward.

CHAPTER XIII

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

HE *IS* sick, I know he is!" and Shirley looked anxiously after the boy staggering into the house next door. "And I know that that old aunt of his will only just scold and make him worse. Oh, I wish Father and Mother would come! They'd know what to do about it!"

"I think I'll run down Sharon road as far as I can to meet them and tell them about it on the way. They'll surely be driving home by this time." And Doris started off as fast as she could go.

"And I'll go over and talk to Doctor Ward," volunteered sociable Madge. "It's clouding over now, and I don't believe he'd mind being interrupted since he can't see to write any more. I've got a scoop for him *this* time, sure! And, anyway, he and Louise always liked Will. They could see good in him when nobody else could."

"Well, then," said Shirley, "Polly and I will get a rousing kitchen fire going for Dicey. She'll be tired, and so will all the rest. That will help her to get supper easy, and besides, there'll be

plenty of hot water on hand if it's needed. Come, Whizzabeth, my most adorable, I'll take you piggy-back." And Shirley whisked her pet into the kitchen, coaxed up the fire, and was briskly setting the supper table when the travelers returned.

"Father's gone with Doctor Ward to see Will," explained Doris a few minutes later, laying the sleeping twins gently on the sofa and skilfully extricating their unresisting arms and legs from their wraps.

"I'll have yore supper ready in no time, Miss Doris," said Dicey, returning from her cabin, "seeing how Shirley's done me sech a good turn with the fire. Come in!" as someone knocked on the kitchen door.

Before the words were out of her mouth, however, the door swung open and an irate woman bounced in. Facing Mrs. Deane, she broke loose with:

"And a pretty state of things it is, the way your youngsters trapped my poor boy in the tree and made him stay there all night! And now he's like to die of pleurisy or pneumonia, the doctor says, and how am I going to nurse him, I'd like to know! I just won't!"

In a flash, Dicey put herself between the angry woman and her mistress. "I never lets nobody do my Miss Doris down!" she exclaimed fiercely. "The boy'd done been daid by this time if it hadn't

been for her children. He was hiding from your sharp tongue, I reckon, when he fell in the hollow and stayed there in the cold all night and most of to-day. No wonder he's sick, he——"

But a slam of the door announced that the scold had flung herself out again, bumping past Doctor Ward and Mr. Deane, who were just returning from their visit to Will.

"Indeed, this is very grave," said Doctor Ward. "I found the boy shaking with a hard, nervous chill which I fear is the forerunner of something serious. I put my overcoat over him and went down to the kitchen for hot water, but the woman had fled and the fire was out. We ought to get Doctor Brandon here from Sharon at once; and the lad ought to have the best of nursing immediately."

"Doris and Shirley could drive in for the doctor," ventured Mrs. Deane, "and I would offer to nurse him here if I knew where to put him, though I'm afraid his aunt wouldn't let him come."

"'Deed you won't nuss him with seven youngwuns already on yore hands," expostulated Dicey. "I'm right smart of a nuss myself. And since the Good Book says: 'To them as stretches gladly, shall more stretchin' power be given,' why not put him up in the kitchen chamber? I'll red it up while you-all's bringing him over. It'll be plenty

warm enough with the stair door open, and I reckon I can make out to keep an eye on him, so don't get fittified about him. His aunt'll be only too glad to get shet of him!"

"I believe it's the best we can do," said Mr. Deane soberly. "If you will go back with me, Doctor Ward, we'll try to persuade our neighbor to lend us the boys awhile."

"Here," said Dicey, "take plenty of kivers to put over him; and I'll wrap up some of these here stove lids in newspapers and put hot water in some bottles for you to put beside him when you carries him across in his cot."

Mrs. Deane and Dicey soon aired the kitchen chamber and made it clean and presentable, Dicey getting down on her old knees to wipe up everything and make the room as comfortable as possible, though scolding all the time about the woman whose inhumanity was putting them to all this trouble.

"Try to forget her, Dicey! I don't think she's quite right in her mind."

"Course she ain't, Miss Doris, but I gen'ly notices that they's always right enough to get what *they* wants!—even folks like her who ain't nawthing but a cross between a persimmon an' a raw east wind!"

In about fifteen minutes, Mr. Deane and Doctor Ward brought the cot over, the patient com-

pletely buried under the warm covers. They had great difficulty in getting him up the kitchen stairs, but finally accomplished it. When they removed the extra covering, they found that the boy was flighty, did not know them, and had a high fever. This was before the days of telephones, trained attendants, electric blankets, rubber ice caps and hot-water bags; and the nursing, always hard enough, promised in this case to be a grim, hard fight.

Calling to Madge to give Elizabeth, Polly, and herself their bread-and-milk supper, while the twins mercifully slept on, Mr. and Mrs. Deane made the poor boy clean and comfortable, snatching a bite of supper only when Dicey could relieve their watch.

Before long, the patient became quite delirious, crying all the time, "Sing to me, sing to me!" To quiet the feverish child, Mr. Deane hummed a soothing old song that but increased his restlessness. Then Mrs. Deane took his hot hand and began singing softly, "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon."

The lad started, opened his eyes, and smiled, "Mother used to sing that to me." Then, as she stroked his forehead gently, he murmured drowsily, "First time anybody's *touched* me—for years," sighed, and fell into a fitful sleep.

Meanwhile, Doris and Shirley were speeding

down the Sharon pike, keeping surprised old Manydays, who usually retired to his stall as soon as he brought Father home, at a lively gait. The Deane children had never before driven without some grown person at hand, but excitement now conquered their timidity, and they clattered on down the dusky road looking fearfully at the strange shadows by the way, and wistfully at the lights beginning to twinkle in the faraway farm-houses.

"Please, Doctor Brandon," panted Shirley, rushing into the office while Doris was tying Manydays to the hitching post, "won't you come right out to see a sick boy at our house? Doctor Ward sent us to ask you."

"I hadn't thought to go out again to-night," said the kindly old physician, "but if my good friend, Doctor Ward, sends for me, it must be very urgent. I'll tell Thatcher to hitch up at once. By the way, how did you get here?"

"My sister and I drove blind old Manydays; she's outside."

"I see. Have you had supper? No? Well, you and your sister take a roll and a plate of soup while I get my things together and Greased Lightning is being harnessed. I can drive you out with me in a few minutes, and Thatcher can follow with your horse at his leisure."

My! Did soup ever taste so good! There was

no difficulty about enjoying the second plate that their host pressed upon them, asking them meanwhile a few shrewd questions so as to take out with him whatever might later be required. Then away they went as fast as Greased Lightning could take them which, as you have probably guessed, was very fast indeed!

By the time Doctor Brandon reached the kitchen chamber, the patient was again tossing and muttering, to the great distress of his three caretakers.

The next morning, the children, not realizing what a struggle the night had been, were surprised to find Doctor Brandon at breakfast. His patient was still so ill that the little Deanes were bundled outdoors as promptly as possible, coming into the house only to sleep. Doctor Ward watched during the entire day, and Doctor Brandon brought Father out in the early afternoon. Again they struggled through an anxious night, but the morning rewarded their efforts, and by the next night the crisis was safely passed.

During Will's convalescence, Dicey was invaluable. Not only did she concoct most appetizing and nourishing dishes for him, feeding him up royally, but she exerted her faculty of making him comfortable, telling him droll stories or crooning weird old "Spirituals" from the South that interested him immediately. Even when she was busy

ironing downstairs, she unconsciously diverted the patient tremendously, droning "the ole-time religion" over and over, in endless monotony, for hours at a time, automatically punctuating it with thumps of the flatiron:

"Oh, the ole-time religion [thump],
Oh, the ole-time religion [thump],
Oh, the ole-time religion [THUMP!]
Is good enough for me."

At other times she would burst out with:

"Oh, I wish I was whar I would be!
Thar I'd be whar I am not.
Here I am whar I must be.
Whar I would be I cannot."

Chorus

"O—h, two-two go before me!
Two-two go behind me,
Two-two take me and carry me
Whar—nobody—kin find me!"

"Oh, Dicey, sing him the creepy one," coaxed Shirley, who had been allowed to pay the first visit to the convalescent. "It makes us go goose-fleshy all over."

So Dicey drew down her face in a frightful

manner and, cowering in one corner of the room, chanted in a sepulchral voice, trailing off at the end in a blood-curdling moan that enchanted her audience:

“Let’s all—be unhappy—together—

And talk—about the ghost—without hai-i-d—

What scart—Mother Mumps—in the sullen—

And frightened—the farmer’s boy—dai-i—d!”

“That’s a good one,” laughed Will. “I didn’t know you had so many talents, Dicey. Give us some more.”

“No more sech foolishness outer me!” And the old cook started rather shamefacedly downstairs. “I never sings that to my youngwuns ’cept when they’re getting over being sick.” And then, to the eager little visitor, “You, Shirley, remember you can’t stay more’n half an hour this fust day! But if you don’t tire him out, you can stay a full hour to-morrer, and the rest of you can take turns a-coming up.”

Sprightly Shirley was just the one for a first visitor, for her eager chatter always stirred the dormancy in others and relieved their dullness. And to-day her nimble nonsense rhymes made the time pass so swiftly that neither she nor the patient could believe it when Dicey called up the open stairway, “Time’s up!”

After Shirley had flitted away, the boy became listless and despondent. Dicey tried in vain to "chirk" him up, and then went in search of her mistress.

"If you could only spare a few moments, Miss Doris, to look in on thet pore boy again! He's just perishing for mothering, I believe, though he did say this morning that he reckoned he was about well enough to go home now."

"What's this about going home?" inquired Mrs. Deane, slipping into the boy's room a few minutes later. "We can't spare you this many a day."

"I've been trouble enough already," replied Will almost churlishly. "You've all been awfully good to me, but I'm not going to impose on you any longer."

"But you are not able to go yet. Do you really *want* to go home?"

"*Want* to go?" Surprise, fear, and shame swept across the boy's face, and he suddenly threw himself down on the cot and burst into tears.

Seating herself beside him and putting her arm across his shaking shoulders, Mrs. Deane said gently: "Tell me about it, dear. Just adopt me for your own mother for a while, and tell me all—the way my children come to me when they are in trouble or naughty."

"I'm not fit! I'm not fit!" he sobbed. "I haven't had anybody decent to speak to, or care,

for years and years. Everybody hates me, the fellows at school, and now your children."

"No, they don't hate you at all! They didn't like it, of course, when they found you were listening and spying on them!"

"I wasn't spying, that is, I didn't mean to. My aunt never speaks a word to me day in and day out, except to scream at me to do some work. And years ago, I got in the way of hiding in the trees so's she couldn't find me. I was up the cherry tree the day you all came; and your children were so funny that I got in the way of listening to them just because I was so lonesome. I nearly fell out of the tree one day laughing at that Madge suddenly trying to turn herself into a fat woman for some game by stuffing two big cabbages up under her apron!" And the boy chuckled reminiscently in spite of his depression.

"And why don't the boys like you?" probed Mrs. Deane.

The boy flushed, hesitated, and then impulsively poured out his story. To one whose life had of recent years been so singularly barren of gentle influences, her sympathy seemed a miracle; and the opportunity to speak out, at last, acted as a wholesome tonic.

Soon Mrs. Deane was in possession of the following facts: When Will Walter's widowed mother had suddenly died, six years before, he had

been sent back to his mother's old home—the house next door to the Deanes—to live with his mother's sister. When brought there, a timid child of nine, he found that his aunt also had passed away, and that her husband was very ill. The sick man recovered sufficiently to marry the rough, queer woman who was serving as nurse and housekeeper, and then he died a few months afterward, never having seen the child playing quietly around the house. Thereupon, the woman assumed the care of the property, made the boy call her "aunt," and promptly began overworking and underfeeding her so-called nephew. For appearance's sake, she sent him to school; and there, for a short time, he was happy because he had been well taught by his invalid mother, and lessons were a joy to him. Then came trouble. After school one day, he saw on the shelf where the lunch baskets were kept, a big apple. Its red-cheeked loveliness was too much for the hungry child, and he devoured it eagerly. This was reported to the teacher, who called on the "aunt" to tell her the circumstances, and suggest that she explain to the child that he should be more careful about touching things that were not his own.

Instead of following the principal's advice, the woman terrified the boy by threatening him with jail, and cowed him into doing all kinds of irksome tasks by making him believe that she was

going to publish his disgrace. Supposing that his schoolmates considered him a thief, he became surly and taciturn, and not only would have nothing to do with them, but made himself greatly disliked by the superior way in which he surpassed them in lessons. Although strong and athletic and longing to join their games, he feared to do so lest his playmates should turn and taunt him. Terrorized by his aunt's abuse, and not knowing how to get out of the treadmill of dread in which he seemed forced to struggle, the desperate boy held off those who might have been friendly by acting as a braggart and a bully with everyone but the Wards. When Tuckaway House had reopened, he found the only amusement of his life in watching unseen, as he supposed, the pranks of the versatile Deanes.

"I am so glad you have told me all about it," said Mrs. Deane compassionately. "Telling is the hardest part, but it is cleansing and keeps things from ever being so hard again. You should not have taken the apple, of course, but it was a natural thing for you to do, under the circumstances. I am sure that your mother would be proud of the way that you are going ahead with your studies; and my children, and your school-fellows, too, are ready to be friendly with you as soon as you give them a chance. You must learn to meet people in a friendly way. The cause of

all this has been forgotten long ago, and I shall see that it is not brought up again."

"Oh, don't say a word to my aunt! Oh, you don't know what she would do if she found out that I had told on her!"

"Don't be afraid, dear!" soothing the panic-stricken boy. "Mr. Deane and I will find some way to make things work out better. You must trust us for that. Now," with an encouraging pat, "forget about it as fast as you can. Madge wants to read or recite to you, so I'll send her up in five or ten minutes."

Amusing the sick appealed to Madge's dramatic sense, and she instantly staged a scene with herself playing the heroine's part—a part like that of one of the "Ministering Children," her favorite book for the minute. "I'll make him forget he's sick! You just see if I don't, Mother! The ministering children were always kind to people with chilblains. Has Will any chilblains, Mother?"

As soon as the little chatterbox had sped up the stairs, Mrs. Deane talked matters over with Doctor Ward and Mr. Deane. Doctor Ward had long been interested in the boy who, in a shy, clumsy way, had shown so much real kindness to his lame granddaughter; but he had always found it impossible to gain Will's confidence.

"The child has been so little understood," explained Mrs. Deane, "that his heart has been half

asleep, almost numb. He has pilfered from hunger, and been taunted and punished by his deriders. Constant humiliation, bitterness and shame have so bitten into his soul that his really brilliant ability has been smothered, and he has drifted into a defiant and despairing attitude."

"Well," said Doctor Ward, "I am sure that we can be of real help to the poor boy now. His surly uncouthness is undoubtedly due to the lack of a mother's soft and moderating touch, and I am confident that the jolly young companionship that is every normal child's right will soon bring out his real self. I'm sure you'll find that he has fine stuff hidden under that defensive shell."

"What practical help do you propose for us to give him now?" asked Mr. Deane.

"My plans are not far enough advanced to give you details, but I can tell you this much. For some time past I have strongly suspected that that woman was not William's aunt, and that she was getting everything possible out of the place under pretext of caring for the boy. When my son, who is a lawyer, was down here last week, I told him about it. He, too, thinks it probable that the place really belongs to William, and is looking up the records necessary to prove it. But we have to proceed very cautiously so that that strange woman will not suspect anything until we are ready to serve the papers on her."

"We shall be glad to keep him right here," said Mrs. Deane, "until your plans are matured."

"It may take several months yet," replied Doctor Ward thoughtfully. "The day before his fall, I asked him if he would not like to go home with us the first of the year. My leave of absence is up then, and I would like to give him a fresh start among boys of his own age, in the Academy of which I am President Emeritus. I could see that he longed for the chance, but was fearful that his aunt would prevent it. His mother was a noted singer, and Louise has discovered that Will has a remarkable voice that ought to be cultivated."

"Doctor Brandon is also much interested in the lad," said Mr. Deane. "We have gone over Will's case pretty thoroughly whenever he has been driving me home; and I believe that the four of us could have a guardian appointed by the Orphans' Court, and the boy's property promptly restored to him. I remember that it was a beautiful old place years ago, and it can be made beautiful again."

Madge had meanwhile breezed into the invalid's room in her usual breathless, tomboy manner, pulling up her stocking, pulling down her blouse, slicking down the hair standing erect behind her round comb—her rosy cheeks aglow with the excitement of the entertainment she had planned to

provide. As she had decided to divert the convalescent with some of her finest elocutionary efforts, she was fairly bubbling over with importance.

With great gusto, she swung into "David's Lament for His Son," rendering it with a fine effect that she completely spoiled when she ended the last line in a heartfelt tremolo, with

"Abalsom, O Abalsom, my son!"

Had not Will been on his good behavior he would have howled with laughter; but he managed to control his features so well that Madge promptly launched forth upon "Only Three Grains of Corn, Mother," pleading with piteous, dramatic intensity "to keep the little life I have, Mother, till the coming of the morn." Then she transferred her pleadings to the Woodman, entreating him to "spare that tree."

"Doctor Ward says that I'm 'picture-minded,' and I guess that's it," remarked the speaker complacently. "When I recite 'The Skeleton in Armor' and say, 'Speak, speak thou fearful guest,' I just see it as plain as plain!" She then wound up with a spirited account of a wreck at sea. When she came to the description of the bride who, when the ship struck a rock, "flew to her husband and clung to his side," she declaimed thrillingly:

"She flew to her husband,
She clung to his *hide!*"

Will's unexpected "Ha-ha!" (instead of the anticipated tears) so nonplussed Madge that she flung herself out of the room in chagrin, and nothing more was heard from the Ministering Child that day.

In great contrast was Doris's visit, for hers was the sunny nature that causes hope to spring up all around. In a most unassuming, almost diffident way she had the knack of taking for granted the hidden best in people, making them say to themselves, "If *she* thinks it worth while, I think I'll have to try again." For this reason, Father had affectionately dubbed her, "Shock-absorber, Junior." This was just the effect that her visit had upon Will, making him rebound from the hopelessness of his difficulties and resolve to get the upper hand of his problems, even though he never discussed them with her.

So satisfactory was Will's recovery, that some of the Deanelets now came visiting every day. Now that Ramona was again away on a visit, Polly brought Lady Teaser with her; for she had always had a warm place in her heart for this neighbor's boy ever since he had rescued one of Lady Teaser's kittens that had fallen down the well. There was something very soothing about Polly's plod-

ding, methodical ways, and something very amusing about the ease with which she ate up big words. Will enjoyed inserting many-syllabled words into his own speech and noting the speed with which his guest unconsciously appropriated them, using them very patly, too.

"Oh, Polly," he teased one day when she told him gravely that Dicey sometimes "transcended her prerogative," "I never knew anybody who snapped up such big words for tidbits to roll on the tongue! Where your sisters collect strings of memory buttons, stamps, and valentines, you collect the longest words you can find! I should think Doctor Ward would be a regular gold mine for you!"

Elizabeth's lisp also diverted him greatly; and he used to love to take the little curlyhead on his lap and teach her rhymes through which "s's" were plentifully sprinkled. Her rendition of "Thimble Thyman met a pieman" and "Thing a thong a thithpence" filled him with wicked glee. During the last five years he had almost forgotten how to laugh, but the lively inmates of Tuckaway House revived the lost art for him.

It was not always smooth sailing, however. Madge formed the habit of dropping in to get Will to do for her some arithmetic examples that her father was now, for some unexplained reason, assigning her daily. While willing to oblige her,

the boy's devotion to Mr. Deane gave him an uneasy feeling about letting his little girl slide out of her work. All his efforts, however, to explain things to her proved vain; for if there was any engaging way in which Madge could wriggle out of doing a bit of real thinking, she always did so. But one day she surprised him by saying:

"I bet you don't know what twenty-five per cent. of twelve hundred dollars is!"

"Yes, I do; three hundred dollars."

"I'll show you how to do it," said the girl patronizingly, her good memory enabling her to recall an example that she had seen pictured under "Percentage" in an old arithmetic, but had not reasoned out at all. Painstakingly she set down the twelve hundred, and placed underneath the twenty-five with a decimal point in front of it; she then multiplied it slowly, and triumphantly pointed off the answer—three hundred.

"That isn't the quickest way," said tactless Will. "Just divide by four, as I did."

"But it isn't four per cent., it's twenty-five," persisted Madge. It was rather hard on the poor child after she had conquered the foundation formula, to be bewildered by this short cut.

"Well, twenty-five per cent. is one fourth of one hundred, goosie, isn't it?" laughed Will.

When Madge realized that the beautiful mathematical castle that she had built up for the boy's

admiration, not only lay in ruins, but was somehow a thing to be laughed at, she suddenly flew into a tantrum and began to boo-hoo, a performance so unusual for Madge, the merrymaker, that it promptly brought Dicey to her defence.

"He's making fun of me. Dicey," she wailed. "He says I am a goose."

"She is," insisted Will, resuming his old, surly manner. "She's nothing but a well-read dunce. She jumps from guess to guess, the same as she jumps from log to log on the river, just because she's too lazy to think a blame thing out."

This was too much for Dicey. Much as she herself might scold Miss Doris's children, she wouldn't allow any one else to run them down.

"The good Lawd didn't give her sech a right smart of brains, p'r'aps, as he done give some other folks, but——"

"Oh, she's got brains enough," interrupted the boy rudely. "She's just too blame lazy to use what she's got."

"She's got somethin' better'n so much eddication," defended Dicey stanchly. "She's got faculty. I'd not only just as lieves have faculty as brains, but I'd a little lieveser. Faculty sometimes sets the river on fire while brains is a studying of it out. Come on downstairs, you pore un-eddicated lamb, and Dicey'll give you a cooky."

But when she got Madge out of hearing of the

enemy, she sang a very different tune. Wheeling on the astonished child, she said:

“You set yoreself down thar now, and think thet thing through right! Shame on you to disgrace yore bringin’ up in sech a way and let yoreself be crowed over by one of the muscular gender! You jest use what brains you got and you’ll soon be a-crowin’ over all the pore white trash they is. Don’t you budge outer that chair till you’ve done it! If you’d done begun sooner, you’d done been all done by this time.”

CHAPTER XIV

MISS FADEAWAY

A FEW weeks later Madge stole into the kitchen so quietly that Dicey started with surprise when she turned and beheld the child huddled on the rush-bottomed chair, her face pale and woebegone.

"What's the matter with you-all, slinking up on a body so stealthy-like?" asked the old cook tartly. Then, noticing her visitor's extreme pallor, "What's the reason you look so peakety, anyway?"

"Nothing." Then, as a spasm of pain contorted her face, Madge asked hurriedly, "Dicey, do you believe it's true that an apple a day keeps the doctor away?"

"So I'se allus heern tell," maintained Dicey stoutly. "Why?"

"Because—because—I guess I've kept 'most a dozen away to-day, but"—shuddering and biting her lip so as not to cry—"but—I guess Doctor Brandon'll have to come awful quick now."

"Doctor, nuthing! Many a sick kitten I've nussed through green-apple colic in my day! Since Will's gone home, up to the hospital you

goes for a spell, and I'll bring up some bottles of hot water, and I reckons we'll get you more easy before Marse Jawge and Miss Doris gits back from town."

But for once, Dicey proved a poor prophet. True, the griping pains vanished in a day or two, but the ruddy, high-spirited Madge lay pale and listless on the bed. Without the customary round comb, her hair gradually assumed a middle part and fell each side of her pallid oval face, giving her an almost saintly look. She slept a great deal, ate nothing, and did not care to have any of the sisterhood around. Shirley's good-natured efforts to amuse her with gay songs were turned down decidedly. Dee Dee's offer to make up a brand-new story—especially for her—was rejected with more hesitation. The little folk evidently wearied her, and only Polly was able to get her to talk. So Polly it was who proudly brought her tray up three times a day, well repaid by being allowed to devour all that Madge resolutely refused to eat.

"Mark my words," said the worried Dicey to her mistress, "the reason that thar Madge gits more and more pindling every day, is 'cause she's low in her mind. She's jest a-laying there a-brooding on something."

"What makes you think so, Dicey?"

"'Cause she don't git no better. She's gitting



MADGE AFTER TOO MANY GREEN APPLES

to look like a sick saint, and she's onsociable, which ain't like her, and because she keeps a pow-wowing and a pow-wowing with Polly all the time. I hears their voices whilst I goes about my work, though I ain't listened yet to what they is saying. I may come to it, though, rather than see her pining away before my very eyes." And the old cook sniffed audibly.

"Oh, Dicey," said Mrs. Deane in alarm, "you don't really think it's as bad as that? Madge has always had an iron constitution. Surely a few green apples couldn't have such serious consequences as you hint at. She has probably become a little self-centred over the novelty of being waited on in bed. You know what strange things sometimes appeal to her keen dramatic sense. The dear child has always made you so much bother that I have often wondered why she and Doris are your favorites."

"Well, Dee Dee, of course, 'cause she's the dead spit of you as a gel, Miss Doris, and Madge—well, 'cause she's such a realizing child. Even when she's most rambunctious and heedless, and I scolds her like my own, I allus has the warmest spot in my heart for her 'cause she has so much—so much—nature. I reckon it's jest as the Good Book says: 'Them that's most pernicketiest is more lovesome than ninety-nine just men that conquers a city.' "

"Yes, Dicey, she is sympathetic and impulsive, but haven't you often noticed, too, that whatever most interests her or whatever she happens to be reading seems sometimes to alter her whole character for the time being?"

"Law, yes, Miss Doris," and the childlike old servitor chuckled as she realized some of Madge's past personations; "but it ain't everly in human nature that it should be so long drawn out as this yere!"

As the days dragged along, Madge became less and less like herself, at last causing her father and mother to hold many anxious consultations.

"Ah, honey, tell yore ole Dicey whar yore misery is," pleaded the baffled old nurse.

As Madge shook her head listlessly, Dicey persisted: "Does you know what you-all reminds me of? You reminds me of one of them ole cotton-tails down in Dixie.—Howcome?" in response to Madge's flash of interest. "Why, my ole man used to say the reason he couldn't never hit one of the critters was 'cause they was so zigzaggy. Whenever he tuk aim, he says, the cotton-tail was in zig, but by the time he shet his shooting eye, it had done loped into zag. See the p'int, honey?"

Madge nodded and closed her eyes.

"I knows jest how you feels," commiserated Dicey. "But you jest got to take yoreself in hand this yere day or you'se gwine fade plumb away.

Now I'm gwine to begin the perking-up business by chaunting thet thar song thet Miss Doris don't think so very edifying, and so I sings it only on very special occasions, 'cause I knows you sets store by it."

Madge smiled faintly, for she well knew what special song she was to be treated to. For once it failed to amuse. Dicey's suggestion of her "plumb fading away" had seized upon her vivid imagination, and the tears were oozing slowly from under her closed eyelids. Shaking her head mournfully, Dicey continued humming softly:

"I danced with a gel with a hole in her stocking,
And her foot kep' a-rocking,
And her foot kep' a-rocking."

Over and over she crooned the inelegant jingle till she finally had the satisfaction of seeing her patient fall asleep.

"I jest can't make it out nohow," said the singer to herself as she tiptoed down the creaky stairs. "Madge ain't never been no cry-baby. And it's plumb ag'in' nature fer her to act thisaway."

Could she have overheard the next conversation in the improvised hospital, she would have had some light on her perplexity. Madge had slept on till Polly arrived with the supper tray—quite out of breath, for Dicey had heaped the

waiter heavily with her most tempting concoctions.

"My, how good they smell!" sniffed Madge.

"Try some of them," urged her sister.

"No, Polly, I said you should have everything but the milk, for bringing up my meals, and I keep my word."

"But, Madgie, I'd *love* to have you eat some of them! Besides, if you don't, they'll begin to suspect. Only to-day, Shirley said as you were getting so ethereal, I was getting more and more pudgy. Two meals three times a day is bound to make anybody 'pudgy.' Horrid word!"

"Not yet!" persisted Madge. "Not till I see my way out. I'm beginning to think, though, that Dicey's about right. She said, Polly, that I'm like a rabbit that bounds from one thing to another. You know I've tried to be just delicate enough to make Father and Mother not want to take us back into the bad city air, and I've made everybody more bother than I'm worth. That is, I started in in a splendid 'zig' and loped into a horrid 'zag,' and I don't know how to get out. It's been awful hard, too, enough sight harder lying here smelling all the good things cooking in the kitchen than it would have been to earn all the money in creation!

"I feel like such a hippercritter, too," she moaned, "worse than Mr. Fair Promiser! I can't

tell anybody but you, because the H. S. H. League promised, you know, not to tell anybody till we'd accomplished our noble object. And as for Motherree and Daddy, when they come up here so sweet and kind, I just long to fling my arms around their necks and pour out my heart to them, but I can hardly say a word for fear I'll burst out crying, and—and—I got to thinking about something Dicey said about my taking myself in hand or I'd fade 'plumb claraway,' and—I guess I'm being too Bethy, and I—I don't know how to stop."

"That's so," assented Polly in awestruck tones. "The real Beth that you've been trying to act like, she—she died, didn't she?"

"Yes," replied Madge, with a sudden return of her old energy. "And I'm not aiming to go that far, because then I'd never enjoy dear old Tuck-away House after we'd all earned it."

"What I can't understand," said the puzzled Polly, "is why you haven't got any money to give to the H. S. H. League when you've worked so hard picking berries this summer. Didn't Doctor Ward pay you anything for scaring the robins from his cherry tree?"

"No: he wanted to, but I wouldn't take a cent. It wouldn't have been fair when they didn't *stay* scared away, like yours did."

"But you earned some other money."

"Yes, but you know I had to give some of it to

Will's aunt for accidentally breaking one of her panes of glass one day when I didn't look where I threw a peach pit away. And then, you know, Mother made me buy with my own money a new pair of garters, after I had lost four pairs."

"Yes, I know, but still you ought to have a dollar or so. You picked berries hardest and steadiest of all of us, Madgie dear. You didn't spend all that for candy, did you?"

"Not a cent—but—but—well—I lent it to somebody till after Christmas, because I thought I'd earn enough more to make it up. I could have, just as well as not, if I hadn't had to stop a week because of my sprained ankle; and then the berry season was over."

"Who did you lend it to?"

"I promised not to tell, but she promised really-truly, blackly-bluely, she would pay me back with the money she'd get on Christmas."

"I know who it was!" exclaimed Polly, with unexpected penetration. "I've been wondering all along where Shirley got that new sash and hair ribbon to wear to the Nortons' party. And after she made such a show giving the cost of it to Toby—humph!"

"Oh, don't tell! I know she'll give it back! I wouldn't mind one bit if it wasn't that I can't be a member of the H. S. H. League after I got it up."

"Why not?"

"Why, don't you remember, we made it up that nobody could be honor members that didn't put something inside Toby? Even darling Whizzie has earned five 'five thentheth' with the paper fagots that Dee Dee taught her how to make. And there is no way for me to do it now but to take what I have saved to buy the family Christmas presents with, and I wouldn't be so mean as to use that. Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas if I couldn't give anything!"

"Yes, it does seem queer for you to be the onliest one not to be a member of the H. S. H. when you are IT for getting up the game.—My, but this johnnycake is good!—Oh, excuse me, Madgie dear," as her sister turned away with a groan. "I forgot you couldn't look Bethy if you ate all Dicey's goodies. It's fortunate for me, though, that I can, because supper's so late on account of Daddy and Motherree being detained in Sharon. I'd just like to know——"

"Like to know what?" asked Shirley who had tripped up the stairs, unheard. "If you mean you'd like to know what made them so late, that's what I flew up here to tell you. They've been to consult Doctor Brandon about Madge, and he says she must have a week at the seaside. Just think of that, Miss Fadeaway! That's worth being sick for, isn't it?"

To her consternation, she saw Madge's color

come back with a rush and her big eyes fill with tears. "Oh, Madgie must be weeping for joy, like the folks in the Bible!"

"I am *not*!" sobbed Madge indignantly. "I wouldn't be so blasphemious! But I just couldn't be happy at the seashore when I'd know all the time that it was taking money away from fixing up Tuckaway House."

Shirley looked truly distressed as she skipped away, and Polly followed soberly with the empty tray.

After they had gone, Madge had it out with herself. Dicey had told her that it rested with her to take herself in hand, and now she did so unsparingly. Facing the situation squarely, she saw that she had failed in her theatrical attempt to make her sentimental pose of one of the characters in "Little Women" a substitute for the money that she could not give. Well, she would just make a clean breast of it and tell Daddy and Motherree all she could without letting out the great secret. She would tell them this very night, too, so they wouldn't plan to spend the money on any seashore trip, and then she would begin again. Poor Madge! She was always having to begin again.

The first practical step, of course, would be to get her strength back by eating—a not unwelcome idea to a little girl who for more than a week past

had been living on two glasses of milk a day. But if she should ask for food now—well, it wouldn't be quite fair to the little confederate who had just taken down the empty tray. The best thing to do, she impulsively decided, would be to climb out the window on to the shed roof and let herself down into the garden where she would be sure to find something edible. Hastily pinning around her the log-cabin patchwork quilt that was Dicey's joy and pride, she was soon groping in the garden. After appeasing her hunger, she explored the bushes where the fruit used to hang thick. Oh, the freedom was delicious out there in the glad green outdoors, and things tasted so good! She did not find many blackberries, however; for she started up when she heard approaching footsteps. Her rainbow wrap caught on the thorns and, without waiting to detach it, she slipped away like a wraith and was quickly back in bed.

As she lay there panting and straining her ears to find if she was being followed, she overheard an altercation going on in the kitchen. Old Josh, Doctor Ward's superstitious gardener, was saying earnestly to Dicey: "I allus believed this yere place was ha'nted, and now I knows it. I see the ha'nt wid my own two eyes not five minutes ago!"

"You did!" ejaculated Dicey. "Fer the land's sakes, whar?"

"Whar? Whar else but in the blackberry canes

whar they allus useter be! You-all thought you'd cross 'em by cutting down those thar high canes when you come here last May. But as they've been growing up again, the ha'nts has begun coming back again."

Madge sprang out of bed and seated herself on the top step so that she could hear more plainly.

"Yessah!" Josh continued, "and this yere ha'nt talks, too!"

"Shucks!" exclaimed Dicey. "Who everly heern tell of a talking sperrit!"

"But it did!" persisted Josh. "When I fust see it, it was scrooged down near the ground, and then it riz up sudden when I stepped on a crackly stick, and it jest floated away. But before it went, I heerd it say jest as plain as plain: 'To keep the leetle life I has, Mudder, till the coming of the morn, said a little voice.'"

"Oh, my! Oh, my soul and body!" and Dicey's loud chuckles fairly rocked the kitchen as an understanding look swept across her troubled face. "Well, you Josh, you take my advice now, and after this you stay to hum after the sun goes down! Then you'll never see no more ha'nts in our black-berry canes, nor nowhere else."

"Why, Madgie dear, how much better you look!" said Mrs. Deane, a half hour later, when



MADGE PLAYS GHOST WITHOUT KNOWING IT

she and Mr. Deane came up to see their little invalid. "Perhaps we won't have to send you to the shore, after all."

"No, Motherree, I couldn't go to the seashore now, I just couldn't. Will you let me sit in your lap and tell you why? I've got to tell you both something that it hurts me to tell."

Snuggled down close between her parents, the shamefaced child told them of her attempt at invalid personation and of its miserable failure.

"But I don't see, dearie, why you tried such a ridiculous thing! What did you think was to be gained by attempting to go into a decline like poor little Beth?"

"Well, I—well—I *did* want us all to stay at Tuckaway House so bad, and I thought—I thought—— Oh, I see now how silly it was!—I just thought if I could fade away a little, you'd feel you must keep me down here in this good country air, and——"

"Did you want to stay as much as that, Midget?"

"Yes, Daddy, and I was so desperated, I couldn't think of anything else to do but to go hungry for a while. It was dreadful, I know, but since I couldn't seem to earn any money for the H. S. H. League, I'd just be a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal if I didn't do *something*. I got it up, you know, and everybody's an honor mem-

ber but me, though I'm IT. And since I couldn't give money to the H. S. H.—"

"What is the 'H. S. H. League'?"

"Oh, that's the worst of it all! I can't tell you what it is, for it's a secret society of honor members earning all they can for a very noble cause. But you'll be glad some day, Daddy," she hinted mysteriously.

"Do you think that it is a good plan to have a secret that you can't tell Mother or me?"

"No, I don't. This has taught me that one 'don't tell' starts more and more 'don't tells,' and I'll never get up another secret society again as long as I live. But this time I'll not only not win the Toby jar for putting in the most money, but I can't put any in at all. And even little Whiz has earned something for this one, and Dicey, too; she made and sold some cakes for it when she was away down South. So, you'll believe this once, won't you, that we are trying for a very noble cause, without my telling you till Christmas just what it is?"

"Surely we'll trust you, Madgie! We have noticed all summer how hard you have worked, and we can't understand why you haven't even more money than the others."

"Well, you see, there was the new window glass to Will's aunt, and a new pair of garters and—and——"

"And what?"

"Well, I didn't want to tell that I lent the rest to somebody. I thought I'd earn lots more, you see!"

"You children ought never to earn, borrow, or lend without consulting us first."

"I know now," agreed Madge repentantly. "Next time I'll make one of you honorary members of every secret society I ever get up! But, you see, Daddy, the one who borrowed it is really going to give it back to me on Christmas morning, though that would be too late for me to give it to the H. S. H. But she really couldn't earn it, you know."

"I don't see why not."

"Oh, no, she couldn't!" And the earnest little face puckered with loyal effort to state her debtor's case fairly. "You see," she said slowly, "she said—it hurt—it pained—her—asthetic sense to think of a girl earning money."

"Oh!" Mrs. Deane suddenly kissed the back of the little penitent's neck that she might hide her amused face. And Mr. Deane whipped out his handkerchief and walked hastily to the window where he several times made a choking, sneezing sound.

"What do you say, Mother," he finally asked, with a twinkle in his eye, "to our promoting this patient from the hospital to the crossways bed?"

"Now?"

"Instanter!"

"Oh, goodness! Won't they all be surprised to find me there in the morning! I wish poor Beth could have got well as quick as this!"

"If an outsider might make a suggestion," whispered Mr. Deane to Madge as he carried her upstairs, "I could tell you to-morrow of a plan by which you might earn your membership in your mysterious club. Mother and I will talk it over to-night!"

"Really? Oh, you dearest Daddy!" crowed Madge. And then cuddling up to Polly's warm back, she said blissfully. "'And now the family mortgage will be paid!' said a little voice."

A few days later a pale but revived Madge in a buff calico dress took her place beside her father in the old carryall.

"Would you like to drive Manydays?" asked Mr. Deane, handing her the reins.

"Oh, yes, Daddy! And on the way to Sharon won't you please tell me once more just what you expect me to do in the bank? I do want to do it all so exactly right."

"I was planning to give this little job to Shirley; but Mother and I concluded that the novelty

of the bank life might help you to get your strength back more quickly."

"Oh, Shirley will be glad you didn't, Daddy!"

"Why?" asked her father with an amused smile.

"Because Shirley—because—well, I can't explain it exactly, but she seems to me to have so—so much puffery about earning money."

"Well, then, I'll tell you exactly what will be expected of you. While Fred, the boy who acts as bank runner, is away on his vacation, we shall expect you to do a few errands for us, perhaps take some papers over to the other bank, and keep the Directors' Room well dusted."

"I'll keep it just shining!" promised Madge enthusiastically.

"Then we have a way of copying in a book, records of the notes protested every day. You write a good, plain hand, Midget, and for every record that you make correctly, you will earn a penny."

"Really? How many protesters are there every day?"

"The number varies—sometimes five or six, sometimes more, sometimes none at all—on an average, from twenty to forty a week."

"Oh, what an easy way to earn a quarter a week!" said the new assistant importantly.

"Not so fast, my dear! It is understood that if

you make one careless mistake during the week, that week's wages will not be paid."

"That's fair enough! I'll be as careful as careful! You just see! How much will I get for doing Fred's errands and things?"

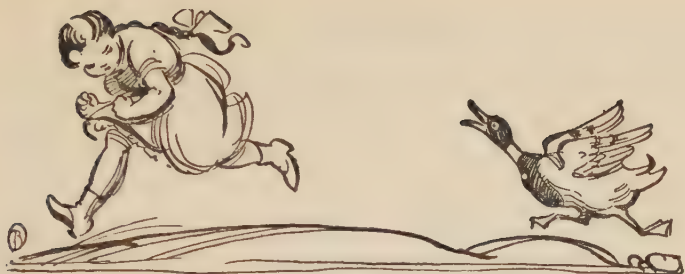
"As you will be there only in the mornings and walk home to dinner, I think perhaps, we could pay you about fifty cents a week."

"Fifty cents a week, and for two weeks! Oh, Daddy, how rich I shall be! Why, with the money my debtor surprised me by paying me back this morning, I'll have—why, I'll have——"

"Wait here on the bank steps a few moments. While I am putting old Manydays in the stable, you can be figuring it out."

Spreading out her stiff calico frock importantly on the upper step, the new bank clerk, with elbows on knees and her chin cupped in her hands, gloated over the earnings that were to bring back her self-respect and further the much-loved cause. With shining eyes she saw it piling up before her, and, entirely unconscious of an amused passer-by, exclaimed:

"'At last my honor is saved!' said a little voice."



CHAPTER XV

SCHOOL DAYS

AND so the long summer days sped happily away, each morning bringing the Deane children fresh zest in making discoveries about the place, each evening settling them more comfortably and more contentedly into the elastic Tuckaway House. More and more, it was becoming a real home-shell brimming over with little folks, and yet with happiness filling all the chinks.

Outdoor work in the garden, faithfully keeping their pledge, indoor work helping to keep the house orderly and comfortable, absorbing and original jollifications including Dicey's roaring bonfire birthday party—all these had given them strong limbs, ruddy cheeks, and a feeling of general well-being and exultation in each day's events.

"You all suttinly is the luckiest of Happy-go-luckies!" exclaimed Dicey.

"Why, Dicey? I don't see why we're so awfully

lucky when we're rather poorish and when vacation is so near over! Tell us why!"

" 'Why,' Shirley? Better say, 'Why not?' You all is happy, isn't you? And you'se always on the go, isn't you? And you shore is lucky, so lucky that you don't dream jest how lucky you is. Folks still in thar goslinghood never does, and so you won't realize just how lucky you-all is until long after you'se grown up, mebbe." And the old woman sighed reminiscently. "Then, some day, you may find as they is folks you can't trust, folks what'll play you mean tricks. And if it wasn't for remembering how upstanding yore own father and mother was, and the loving times you've all had together, you'd get discouraged and say to yore-selves: 'They ain't no more good folks in the world, they's all bad and deceitful.' Then they'll come a-creeping into each of yore hearts the thought, 'Well, Mother was good and true, and Father was good and plucky, anyway! I've had *them* anyhow, and I reckon it's up to me to freshen up and show folks what they done done for me.' The fact that you've *had* 'em, honeys, will serve you as a crutch many a day, and make you see you-all's lucky for life, no matter what bad luck comes sagashiatin' aroun' later on."

Somewhat sobered by this unexpected bit of homely philosophy, the Happy-go-luckies went thoughtfully about their morning tasks; and, under

Madge's leadership, soon decided to make the very best of the blessings around them, working and playing with such increased energy that Tuck-away House again rocked with their jollity and fun.

So September first came slipping in almost without their realizing it, until preparations were begun for Ramona to go to boarding school. After she had left, their long, blithesome vacation would really be over.

"I wonder," mused Polly, as they were driving home after giving their cousin a rousing send-off at the railroad station, "whether we will be started at the Sharon school, or whether we will continue studying here at home until our six months' camping-out is up, and then resume our places in the city schools!"

"Oh," Madge croaked, "I choose not to go to *any* old school till we know where our home is going to be! I'm loathsome to start again! What's the use of changing all the time, anyway?"

These were very serious questions for Mr. and Mrs. Deane to answer. They realized that, while everyone had been well and happy all summer with doors and windows wide open, eating on the porch and living in the fresh air the greater part of the day, things were bound to be different now that there was a nip of frost in the air. Soon there would have to be closer quarters; heating might

prove a problem, and living half a mile from the Sharon school might be another. All these things would have to be carefully thought out.

"I could enclose the porch with a double set of glass windows," said Father thoughtfully, "and so continue to use it as a dining room and sun room. Neighbor Jones has returned 'the old salamander,' as we used to call that big, round stove with the double row of isinglass windows. It has an extra heating pipe that goes into a register in the room above. We could set the stove up in the playroom (which would have to serve also as a study room) and the heat from the register would take the chill off the children's sleeping room. With the hearth fire in the living room, the Franklin stove in our bedroom, and Dicey's good fire always going in the kitchen, we might manage to get along till New Year, anyway. These things might serve as a makeshift, but the old place needs a thorough going over in order to make it a year-around house. It would cost considerable money, too. What do you say, family? I know the old house cannot now be as comfortably heated as when I was here as a boy, but we could probably get along here till the first of the year."

"Oh, let's stay! . . . Let's stay!" chorused the children. "They say a winter in the country

means nutting parties and popcorn parties, and taffy parties, and coasting, and skating, and we've never had any of it. . . . Oh, *do* let's try it!"

"I think it might be well to try it till New Year!" agreed Mother. "And it would be a pity for the children to lose those next four months of school, whatever we decide. The daily walk home would be good for them, and if we find by Christmas time that the place can be made cosy, your position at the bank assured, and the cold weather agrees with them all, they could keep right on with their studies at Sharon. If, on the other hand, it seems best to go back to the city, the children will be better able to fit into classes there. I haven't seen you look so well," and she smiled affectionately at her husband, "since you had typhoid fever, and I believe that if we can make the place really livable, it will be as good for you as for the children. If we finally decide to make Tuckaway House our permanent home, why not enlarge it by building next spring two chambers above the porch sun room?"

And so it was decided that the five oldest were to enter the Sharon school. "If Mother is willing to try it, we all ought to be eager to help her," said Father. "For close quarters are always harder on the mothers than on the other members of the family."

My, what a work it was to get the little army off that first morning! Dicey put up the five lunches while Mother plied the comb and brush, and by the time Father brought old Manydays around, there were five little folk waiting with shining eyes and faces; five pairs of legs in red-and-white striped stockings and sturdy shoes (Madge's had to be copper-toed, for she went through a pair of the ordinary kind every two weeks); five crisp white pinafores; five brand-new lunch boxes; five brand-new slates, with slate rag and water-bottle outfit; five excited little hearts beating rapidly at the prospect of whatever adventures this section of the great school world might have in store for them.

Mother and Dicey looked laughingly at each other as the packed carryall drove out of the yard, and then drew a long breath and sat down rather weakly, feeling as though a whirlwind had passed over the place, leaving a strange, unearthly calm in its trail. In one way, these blessedly quiet hours were a great help for Mother, enabling her to weave into orderly design many a loose end that, during the summer hurly-burly, had been tangled, overlooked, or put out of sight.

As she went about, picking up the things left in the path of the whirlwind, her mind was following her children into the new schoolrooms. Doris and Polly were naturally such good students that

there was no doubt about their making their way. They were both keen to dig into the interesting world-stories and treasures of information waiting for them as they made the different grades. It was no trouble for them to stand longest in the spelling matches, for they were born good spellers.

Shirley, too! She was ambitious, and would leap lightly into the arena, appropriate what seemed good to her, and bound lightly off again. In spite of her teasing ways and mischievous pranks (she had been known to lead the closing march with her short front curls crossed in her teeth and hanging out each side like walrus tusks), she would dance her way into popularity, as usual.

And surely everybody would be kind to lisping, curly-headed Elizabeth on this, her first day at school!

But Madge!

Madge not only could not parse "Hamlet" and diagram "Paradise Lost," as her older sisters could, but more than that, she had in the back of her mind an able-bodied determination never to attempt it. Since the days were never long enough for her to do what she wanted to, she reasoned, why bother with such dry-as-dust stuff? Jog-trot Polly had soon caught up with her quick-as-a-flash sister, and in this school would probably be graded ahead of her.

To-day Madge would carry off her initiation

with her usual hurrah, of course, but how would she come out at the end? Very bright, very dramatic, with a gift for leadership, and a beguiling way of sliding out of doing the unpleasant thing, she, nevertheless, had caused her father and mother many an anxious moment; for they realized only too well the wretched foundation on which she was building. As they reviewed her unstudious school life, they found much to amuse but little to comfort them.

When she had first entered a small private school, six years before, she had devoted so much more time to getting acquainted than to learning **her** letters—bobbing up first in one corner of the room and then in another—that finally the teacher in desperation had tied her fast to the low green chair in which the beginners sat. Nothing daunted, Madge continued her visiting, like the snail carrying her burden on her back. The very sight of Little Sociability skittering all around the room with the chair tied to her naturally caused such uproarious amusement that the teacher picked her up, chair and all, and bestowed her in a dark corner under her desk. There Miss Cherrycheeks stayed till the closing bell rang, occasionally peering around the teacher's skirts, to make faces at her playmates with bewitching drollery, and then hastily drawing in her head.

When asked the following day how to spell

"cat," Madge had hesitated. As she had paid no attention to the lesson, she hadn't the slightest idea about it. Then, with a most engaging smile, without a trace of impudence, she said, "Well, *you* know, Miss Edgar, and I know; so what's the use of talking about it?" To her great surprise, this speech was greeted with a roar of laughter from the listening school. That laugh, alas! started Madge on the wrong track and kept her there for many years. It started her to treat all lessons as a joke to be absorbed on the run—mostly by remembering the correct answers of others, by reading accurately her teacher's expressions, or by shamelessly guessing and wheedling her way out. Because of her love of stories, she had made rapid strides in her reading; and she could retell the lesson in a charming, vivid way that always won high praise from visitors, before whom she was invariably asked to show off. Because of her good memory, she was a great talker and piece-speaker, and so impetuous and jolly was she that she generally threw the conscientious and better-informed Polly completely into the shade.

When it came to arithmetic, Madge sailed over it in the same superficial way, coaxed Polly, her devoted slave, to "do sums" for her, and endured with bad grace Dee Dee's patient struggles to drill her in the multiplication tables. When she needed, for her own personal benefit, to reason

out any financial undertaking, she did it by original methods not found in Greenleaf. For instance, when paying her daily visit to the little shop where the children flocked at noon to spend their pennies for candy, jackstones, and huge gingerbread "Bolivars," her quick eye descried this sign over a tin plate filled with broken chips of taffy:

TWO PIECES FOR A CENT

Pondering over this puzzler, she made her usual purchase of a succulent "sour-ball," large and lemon-flavored; for Teacher had decreed that things already in the mouth when the bell rang need not be removed; and Madge had discovered that a sour-ball inserted at the first stroke of the bell, frequently shifted and discreetly husbanded, could be made to outlast the afternoon session. But that mouth-watering taffy! For three days she studied over those golden-bronze slabs in fascinated silence; then she could stand it no longer.

"Please, Mr. Turner," she said, beaming upon the old shopkeeper, "please give me one piece of that taffy."

He began digging his knife into the candy to get it loose from the pan. "I'll give you two pieces for your penny, little girl."

"Oh, I haven't any penny," Madge replied earnestly, "but I've just thought it all out like this:

If it's two pieces for one cent, then it must be one piece for nothing, isn't it? So, *please*, Mr. Turner, give me one piece for nothing!" And smiling frankly at him, she held out her hand in such a confiding way that the old skinflint actually did it—the very first time that he had ever given anything away in his thirty-five years of storekeeping. He told about it himself, too, chuckling over the way "the cashier's little gel blarneyed me out of a chunk of taffy."

In the same manner, when Madge finally arrived—with no foundation—at the beginning of fractions, she employed an entirely original process of reasoning. Using a wrinkled russet apple by way of illustration, the teacher had deftly explained to the class how to cut it into two parts or halves, suiting the action to the word; then she showed them that by cutting each of these halves into halves they would get fourths or quarters. "In the same way," concluded the teacher hastily, "you can cut anything into three fractional parts or thirds."

Now, Polly, who had just caught up to Madge and would soon go far beyond her, grasped the fractional principle at once, but was puzzled to know how to cut a round apple exactly into thirds, and asked for a demonstration. But before the teacher could explain, Madge bounded from her seat, swinging her hand almost under the instruc-

tor's nose in her anxiety to be given permission to speak, and exclaimed contemptuously, "Why that's as easy as easy! Can't I tell her, Teacher?"

"Certainly!" Teacher was only too glad to have made any impression upon the class block-head.

"Well," began Madge, looking importantly at Polly, "you cut it first into halves and that's two parts, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"And you cut each of them into two parts, and that's four parts, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then," suiting the gesture to the word, "you just chuck the extra one away."

In spite of such amazing computations, Madge had been promoted from grade to grade, often passing by the skin of her teeth, but going up just the same. One reason for this was that, in addition to her knack at recitation and reading, she could write most amusing and original compositions—another show-off accomplishment—provided painstaking Polly corrected, before they were handed in, all the careless spelling and errors in punctuation. Madge was a good penman, too, preferring to cover her slate with shaded Spencerian birds and fancy feathers, to wrestling with a "sum" in long division. Her high marks in writing and memory studies made up for her near-zero

marks in arithmetic, bringing her yearly average to the lowest required passing mark. Discovering how terribly her arithmetical groundwork was honeycombed with daring guesses and neighborly promptings, each grade teacher in turn had dodged the task of going back to first principles with her, and had boosted her up for the next instructor to wrestle with.

No wonder, then, when her entrance into the Sharon school came up for consideration, that the examining principal found her on the Delectable Mountains of the Seventh Reader, but still struggling in the Slough of Despondent Fractions. After talking it over with the principal, Mr. Deane said that night to his wife:

"I am going to put a stop to this forever. I'm sorry that we have both been either too ill or too busy to take a hand in the matter before; and I haven't time to go on with the arithmetic lessons that I have been trying to give her these last few weeks. I am going to start to-morrow by offering Polly a dollar to drill Madge in the multiplication tables, so that she will master them, anyway. Once in Polly's bulldog clutch, I know that she will not be able to wriggle out, and the rest of the arithmetic will be bound to follow. And I'll make the proviso that the drills shall take place in the kitchen, so that you will not be worried by them. I am sure that Dicey will back up Polly."

"That will help a great deal," said Mrs. Deane thoughtfully, "but do you think it will be enough?"

"No, I have something else up my sleeve. This is my master stroke: There is to be a torchlight parade in Sharon in about eight weeks, and I am going to announce that I will take in to see it all the children that have held the head of the class for a week."

"A whole week!" Mrs. Deane was aghast.

"Yes. Madge will try with all her might, because she will be so eager to go. The drill in the weeks when she does not make the head will be splendid preparation for her. If she can hold the head one week for this treat, she will be shown that she must not slip back afterward."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TORCHLIGHT PROCESSION

YOU are sure now," bantered Doctor Ward, "that this is a trustworthy scoop? I can't afford to pay out my hard-earned shin-plasters for mere rumor, you know."

"Honor bright!" And the little scoop-bringer hastily retrieved a wandering stocking. "Father told us last night that the big torchlight parade is to be a week from next Friday night."

"And are you planning to witness it?"

"That depends," and the eager childish face clouded over. "It seems as though I never tried so hard for anything in all my born days, but—but—you never can tell."

Excitement was certainly running high in the Deane household over the honor of viewing their first torchlight parade. When Grant was elected, they had all been considered too small for Father to shepherd through the city hurly-burly, so the torchbearers had tramped past the edge of the modest neighborhood in which the Deanes lived without waking one of the little sleepers.

But in Sharon things would be very different.

The bank was in the big square "Exchange" building in the center of the town, commanding a splendid view of the formation in the park and the far-flung line of march. The families of the bank officers were to have chairs before the great glass windows reaching to the floor. The music, the lights, the unusually late hour—what a combination! And best of all, Father was going to be in the procession. He was going to ride blind old Manydays!

"Just think how thrilling it will be to see your own father riding with the officers at the head of a torchlight cavalcade! I bet you all a billion squillion that he looks the scrumptiouslest of the lot!" And Madge capered around in the greatest excitement.

"Perhaps you won't see him," teased Shirley. "Father said, you know, that only those who stood head for a week could go."

Madge's high spirits simmered down. No one knew better than she the hollow spots in her school foundations. It would be hard enough to work her way to the head. But to stay there for a week! A whole week! Why had Father, who was generally so considerate, made such a hard condition? And a look of dogged determination settled on her usually care-free face. "I'll get there somehow—see if I don't! But—oh, my!"

There would be no trouble about it for Polly

and Doris. They headed their classes anyway; and Shirley, too, could do it easily if she would ever stop dancing long enough. But Madge!

"Begin the very first day, dear!" encouraged Mother when Father had issued his surprising ultimatum at the opening of the school term. "Then, even though you fail the first week, you will have gained some foundation for the second. There are only six or eight working weeks, you know. Father will keep his word, and you'd hate to see them all ride away and leave you with Dicey and the little folks."

It had proved a far stiffer fight than even Madge had anticipated. She got terribly tired of Polly's trip-hammer drill with the multiplication tables, and at first tried to wriggle out by saying that she could study better if she could rest a little and return after a breathing space; but Dicey held her fast with, "No more of yore piecrust promises now! No more of yore zigzagery! You shorely stands in need of all the help that can be shoved inter you, and the onliest thing you can do now is to work twice as hard and play twice as less!"

"Oh, the Mock Turtle was just right to call multiplication 'uglification,'" Madge wailed. "It's the ugliest beast I know, and it makes me ugly, too."

"Well, then, make a game of old Uglification! Play that he and Distraction are the lions before

the Palace Beautiful at the top of the Hill of Difficulty," suggested Doris. "You can't climb up any other way, you know! We'll help you past the roaring lions! And don't you forget, Madgie dear, that those who did climb up found that the lions were chained, after all!"

But in spite of all the help that her sisters could give her, Madge had, at the end of the first week, risen only three places from the foot which she had heretofore occupied as a matter of course. By the end of the third week, her interest was really aroused, and her footing growing more secure. One day she actually reached the place next to the top, but, made careless in her good fortune, she fell back the day after.

She was not naturally a good speller like the others. In fact, knowing her weakness, she had never taken spelling seriously. "Oh, well, what's the diff?" she would answer coolly when shown that she always spelt "dose" for "does." "You all know what I mean, don't you?"

But the time had now come for her to mean the right thing. To her sisters, a merry-making without Madge was unthinkable; so before going to sleep they drilled her every night in the crossways bed till she was letter perfect in the next day's spelling lesson. She'd go up head this time, you just see!

Sure enough! when the big spelling class stood up and toed the line, and the head girl, with a flirt of her curls, began spelling "sarsaparilla," pronouncing each syllable after spelling it, in the old-fashioned way, Madge rejoiced in her sure knowledge of the way to handle it. If it ever filtered down to her, she'd show them for once. And here it came—down, down, down. Number one failed to double the "l"; the next doubled correctly but missed on the second syllable; the next missed on the third vowel. It was coming! It was coming! Only three more now! Only two more! Now, Madge—go it!

The child had been leaning far forward, hair rampant and cheeks aflame, to catch the word the minute that the one above her failed. Her confident enunciation of the letters rang out now on the ears of the tense listeners—"s-a-r, sar; s-a, sa, sarsa; p-a, pa, sarsapa; r-i-l, ril, sarsaparil; l-a, la, sarsaparilla." And then, as she started triumphantly up the line, beside herself with elation, she added giddily, "ity; sarsaparillaity."

A roar of laughter spread over the room. The teacher laughed, too. Then the excitement broke loose. "Oh, she's missed, too! . . . She's missed, too! . . . Now we've all missed, and so now we're all just where we were before!"

Madge, holding her hard-won position at the

head, looked questioningly at Teacher. It couldn't be true! It just *couldn't!* Hadn't she spelled "sarsaparilla" all right? Why, of course she had! What if she did tail it with that silly "ity"! Couldn't everybody *see* that that was just her excitement trailing off?

No! Everybody couldn't, or wouldn't, see; and the lesson went on with Madge again at the foot. Now her fighting blood *was* up! Instead of bursting into expected tears, she bit her lip and concentrated as never before. Such a chance to sweep to the head might come only once in a lifetime. Well, then, she'd have to inch up. She'd just show them! And inch up she did, three, four, five, six places; but at the end of the lesson, the five best were still ahead of her. Never mind! To-day was only Wednesday. If she could but make the head to-morrow or next day, and hold it all next week, there was still a chance.

If! If! If! And a very sober Madge went back to her seat and applied herself diligently to the next day's lessons.

"I am really afraid that the poor child will not make it," confided Mrs. Deane to her husband, while rehearsal was in full swing in the crossways bed that night.

"So am I." Mr. Deane sighed. "But she will have to stay home if she fails! I could think of no better way to shock her into the realization that

she can do well if she cares enough. If she makes it, I do not believe that she will ever slide back into quite the shameless shirk that she has always been at school. She is getting now the good grounding that she has dodged for the past five years, and I shall show her afterward that no child of ours can be a quitter and retain her self-respect."

Well, Madge did make the head by Friday afternoon. But she was in no way elated. To hold it would be harder still. Coached by her sisters, and goaded on by Dicey, she spent Saturday studying, rehearsing, and studying again. She held it Monday. She held it Tuesday. But the tension was telling on her, and she was overwhelmed with the miserable feeling that she could not stand the strain on Wednesday.

"I know now," she confided to Mother, "just how that boy at the dike must have felt with all those weighty waters pressing against his teeny hand."

Wednesday afternoon, the teacher surprised them with a written quiz in spelling. Writing down the words quietly at her own desk, Madge felt sure that they were all correct; and so one more dangerous day was safely passed. And Thursday was like unto it, how strange! Never before had there been spelling tests two days in succession. Madge felt her confidence coming back. She was still stopping the leak in the dike.

"More examinations to-morrow, Teacher?" she asked eagerly.

"No more," and Teacher smiled her queer little smile.

Well, if there were to be no more examinations, she'd just have to make the effort of her life to hold that last day. "Only think," she groaned to her sympathetic sisters, "how perfectly awful it will be for me to fail at the last hour!"

"But don't let yourself *think* of failing, Madgie dear!" encouraged Doris. "We just won't let you! We're going to drill you inside out, and upside down, and backward and forward. Come on, now!"

In spite of the fact that, during that famous grill, Madge answered correctly every question in geography and history, had the solution of every arithmetic problem neatly worked out and ruled off on one side of her slate, with trimly diagrammed sentences on the other, and could spell every word "trippingly on the tongue" she, nevertheless, felt unequal to the strain of this Friday afternoon.

Dicey tried, in her usual way, to restore her morale by putting up an unusually substantial lunch for the quavering child. Then, scowling in a puzzled way at Madge's slate with sentences diagrammed in long ovals, she said to her encouragingly:

"Though I can't figger out myself exactly what drawing them link-sassingers has got to do with yore school-learnin', honey, I'se sartin sure thet somehow it's gwine to put an end to yore being the fambly wheelbarrow!"

"How do you mean, Dicey? How could I be a wheelbarrow?"

"Well, so far you ain't never toted yore own self, has you? When it come to school learnin', you'se always settled yoreself stockstill in the path till yore sisters or teachers come 'long by, picked up yore handles, and trundled you down the right path, hain't you? Well, then," looking triumphantly at the group, "after this, I'se sure Madge'll jest trundle her own self, now she's learnt the knack of it, sassingers or no sassingers! You-all mark my words, now, and see if she done don't stop being the fambly wheelbarrow and beat the very beatinest! Here's Marse Jawge with yore chariot!"

Highly amused, the five climbed in; but Madge could not be roused from her dispirited apathy. When the last gong sounded, she entered the classroom very reluctantly. Yes, she was positive that she knew her lessons, but—somehow—something queer might happen, as on that awful "sarsaparillaity" afternoon. And she just couldn't stand missing to-day! She just couldn't! Grimly she worked through the morning session, and after the

noon recess, mechanically filed into the school-room with the others.

Glancing at the child's woebegone face, Teacher said:

"As this is Friday afternoon, and many of you have brought notes asking to be excused early in order to rest before going to the torchlight procession to-night, I have decided that we won't have any regular lessons this afternoon. Instead, we'll just have some recitations and then be dismissed. Will any one volunteer to speak a piece?"

Dead silence. Then a hand shot up.

"Well, Madge?"

"I wish I knew that one about the man that was just saved from getting hanged, but I haven't learned it all yet.—I know just how he felt!—But I can recite 'Excelsior!'"

"Very well, that certainly has been your motto of late."

So, with shining eyes, Madge repeated, "The shades of night were falling fast," and then, by request, gave a spirited recitation of "Lochinvar's Ride." Speaking pieces was better than excited tears, and the sudden relief to her overwrought feelings was demanding some outlet. "I just won't cry for 'em!" she vowed as she swung into "Barbara Frietchie." And Teacher, understanding, thought it best to let her recite for a while—espe-

cially as the children always enjoyed listening to her original dramatic touches.

As the scholars filed out, Madge stopped to say, "Oh, Teacher, you never knew you saved my life by not having lessons this afternoon, did you?"

"Didn't you know your lessons, Madge?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly; but you saved my life just the same, and you never knew it, did you?"

"Didn't I?" returning Madge's hearty kiss; and then, looking after the buoyant child skipping briskly home, Teacher again smiled her queer little smile.

"I'm so proud of my little daughter," greeted Mother, who had been watching rather apprehensively for the return of the school children until she had, afar off, spied Victory perching on Madge's cap.

Giving her mother a whirlwind hug and a "love pat" that fairly made her wince, Madge shrilled, "Oh, I'm so grateful to everybody for being glad for me and trying to help me so! What can I do, Mother, to show how grateful I am?"

"Do? Why just keep right on making us proud of you."

"All right! I'll *try* not to be the baa, baa, black sheep of the family any more, now that you've all given me such a good start. But I'm afraid it's going to take an awful lot of scrubbing to keep *me*

white. Now, 'Heigh for boot and horse!' said a little voice!"

Madge's spirits mounted higher and higher as the four girls drove into town with Father in the crisp night air.

"It's worth it all, Daddums," and she snuggled closer to her father. "If I just hadn't been such a slide-outer before, it would have been easy enough. Oh, look at that rocket!"

"And look at the lights in all the houses! . . . And the pails of tar burning before the gates! . . . And the flags! . . . And the men with their capes thrown back to show the pretty lining colors underneath!"

They found the Exchange beautifully decorated and illuminated, and Louise, who had returned the night before greatly benefited by her three months' stay in the sanitarium, already waiting for them in the bank. As soon as Mr. Deane had settled his excited quartette before one of the big glass windows, he left them, to put the carry-all in a friend's barn and a saddle on old Many-days. He had found the ancient beast very tractable when saddled and parading around Tuckaway House, so he did not anticipate any trouble.

The responsibility of behaving themselves with

no grown folks to admonish them, and the important feeling that always came over them when wearing their "go-to-meetings" made the Deane children at first feel a little "churchy," as Madge said. But other families soon joined them, and the chatter became very lively. "I'm *so* glad," said Louise to Polly, "that we live in the days of gaslighting! Don't you remember, Dee Dee, in the Familiar Science textbook that you are teaching me, that terrible picture of a blazing electric light casting the awfulest shadow? It makes me shiver every time I look at that shadow where one man is clutching another——"

"I know," interrupted Shirley; "the reading underneath says: 'Electric lighting can never be made practical because of the dense shadows that it casts, giving opportunity for crime.'"

"I don't see why any one would *want* anything lovelier than this gaslight!" and Polly clapped her hands ecstatically. "Anything brighter would be a great superfluity!"

As the others became noisier with excitement, Louise became more silent, and the rest of the evening was for her one daze of joy. For the first time in five years, she was able to sit through an evening's entertainment; and she clung to Dee Dee's hand in speechless ecstasy.

Meanwhile, Madge, piquant of face and radiant in fine feathers, was, as usual, exercising her

social gifts and asking questions that greatly amused her auditors. Although the procession was late in starting, as such things generally are, time seemed to fly past on magic wings. Out-of-town companies in gay uniforms marching to reinforce the home muster, and the fanfare of passing bands on their way to join the main line, kept Madge's feet tapping; and the excited marshals galloping back and forth kept expectation keyed to concert pitch.

"I didn't know that you were so interested in politics, Little Quicksilver," chaffed one of the venerable directors.

"I'm not excited about the politics exactly, Mr. Norton, because I don't know exactly what they're all about," and Madge hesitated. "But I do know," pulling herself quickly together, "that I want Mr. Hayes elected because Dee Dee saw General Grant at the Centennial, and Mr. Hayes will be another Republican president; and I think we ought to have Republican presidents, always, don't you?"

Surprising a twinkle in the old gentleman's eye, she hurried on without waiting for his answer:

"And I can sing the campaign song:

" 'Hayes rides a white horse,
Tilden, a mule,
Hayes is a gentleman——'

Mother doesn't like us to sing the rest of it. But I guess you can guess it?" And encouraged by his sympathetic wink, she rattled on: "Yes, I think I'd like politics. If there was a torchlight parade every night, I'm sure I'd like it, and I wouldn't care *which* party was processioning."

"There speaks the regular politician," said her genial friend, with whom she had come to be on the best of terms during her summer work at the bank. "Your father, I understand, is also to ride a white horse, like the gentlemanly Mr. Hayes. Here they come now!"

First the head marshal on a horse with a white star on his forehead, stepping as though on eggs, sidling, tossing his head and curving his neck, almost rearing, as his owner displayed his skillful horsemanship. Then a band, clangorous and martial, blowing out cheeks to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia." Flag-bearers, officers! Then a squad of men dragging a small cannon! And then, oh, proud moment! four gentlemen riding abreast! The Deanes knew them all—Doctor Brandon on Greased Lightning, Doctor Ward on a borrowed steed, the principal of the school on a restless sorrel, and Father on blind old Manydays! Didn't Father look straight and handsome, though, in his wide felt hat and blue cape lined with red? And old Manydays hadn't seemed to mind the band nearly as much as some

of the other horses had. Father had his wonderfully groomed and trimmed up with red, white, and blue rosettes that Mother had made, making him look quite youthful as he stepped smartly along.

"Old Manydays seems to be in his second colthood," piped up Polly.

"Why do you call him Manydays?"

"Because," flashed Shirley, "he's lived so many more days than any horse ought to live."

"Oh, oh! They're getting ready to shoot off the cannon!" And three little pairs of green kid gloves were clapped to three little pairs of ears.

"Oh, I don't want it to go off! I'm so scared, it tickles my stomach something awful!" squealed Madge. "Oh, *please* don't let them set it off right here!"

But off it went with a startling roar that set all the horses, already excited by the lights and music, to wheeling and curveting in a most terrifying way.

Poor blind Manydays outdid them all. The unexpected detonation, so close to him, frightened him nearly out of the last year of his life. He started to run like a colt, but Father turned him around, soothing and stroking him, and then around again, and had just got him really quieted down when there came—*another* explosion! Then

rearing, sidling, bolting, rearing again, down came Manydays—right astride the cannon!

"Oh, look, he'll be killed, he'll be killed! Make 'em not explode it again while he's straddling the cannon!" wailed Madge.

Fortunately, the gunners were able to draw the smoking cannon from under the horse's legs; and the men who had been riding abreast stood, two on each side of the street, while a company carrying streaming torches passed by; then the four horsemen fell in behind them.

The flickering gleams and shadows as the thud, thud, thud, of the marching feet of squads of stalwart men went swinging by, the tarry perfume, the flare of the beacons, the blare of the bands, oh, there was nothing quite like it!

As the last group blazed past, someone said, "Now, children, let's go into the Directors' Room. From its windows we can see it all over again. as they wheel around the park."

"But I'm fearsome," protested Madge, still trembling. Shirley noted with dismay that Madge still had her arm tight around Mr. Norton's leg, which she had unconsciously seized in her terror. "I don't want to see them touch off the cannon again!"

"They won't! See, they are putting it back in its regular place in the Square! And don't you

hear what the Fife and Drum Corps is playing?"

"Yes, indeed! 'The Girl I Left Behind Me'! Well, they won't leave *me*!" And, clasping Mr. Norton's hand tight, she followed the others into the next room, informing her old friend confidentially: "Will Walter is one of the fifers, you know. Father showed him how when he was getting well at our house."

"How's the H.S.H. fund coming on?" whispered her companion. "Old Toby still 'swellin' visibly'?"

"Why, Mr. Norton, how did you know? Who told you?"

"Nobody told me; but some straws dropped by the birds of the air seemed to point in that direction."

"We're hoping the hardest we ever hoped," replied the child earnestly. "But we can't be sure till Christmas.—Oh, here comes the parade again!"

Sure enough! All over again it came—the color, the measured tramp, the music, the mettlesome steeds, the streaming pine knots, the magical rhythm of it all—making the pulse beat fast and the feet mark time! "Oh, I don't think even the Celestial City could have looked more beautiful to the Pilgrims!" exclaimed the young politician fervidly. "And there's Father again, riding old

Manydays cavorting as though he liked it, to the tune of 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home'!"

The novel experience seemed to have put new life into the old creature's bones and, after the great event was over, he klip-klapped down the homeward road at too lively a pace for the children, who wished to stretch out the evening's enjoyment as long as possible.

"Just look at all those stars up there winking at us!" said Shirley. "Some of them are twinkling so hard, it seems as if I could almost hear them snap. I wonder if the little folks living up there ever *could* have such good times as we've had to-night!"

"I don't believe there's any politics up there," Madge flung back at her as she tore into the house. "I wouldn't care at all about living in a star where there wasn't any politics so's I could see a torchlight procession once in a while, would you?"

CHAPTER XVII

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

WIDE awake in the crossways bed, in the dusky dawn of Thanksgiving morning, the little Deanes were awaiting Father's cheery rising call.

"Let's each give a reason for being specially thankful to-day," suggested Doris.

"All right! I choose to be f—last!" cried Madge trying desperately to improve her manners. "What's yours, Shirley?"

"I'm thankful I'm getting to know some stylish city people."

"And I'm thankful we're able to give them such happy times," added Doris.

"I haven't decided yet what I'm thankfulest for," said Polly slowly. "And Whizzie darling, what's yours?"

"I'm thankful I've earned thoth five thentheth."

"And I'm thankful, too, that fat old Toby is 'swellin' wisely'!" crowed Madge.

"What's 'swellin' wisely,' Midget?" And there was Father on the stairway.

"Oh, that's our secret, Daddy. It has something to do with our noble cause."

"All right! The clothes line's in order. Hurry up, now, and then hurry down to enjoy your first country Thanksgiving."

To the Deanes, a genuine country Thanksgiving was an experience heretofore enjoyed only on the pages of an appetizingly written book. But now that they could garner in the things for which they were thankful, they began to glimpse the true meaning underlying that first Thanksgiving that their forefathers had celebrated here more than two hundred and fifty years ago. Hadn't they themselves gathered the nuts and cracked them, raised the popcorn and popped it, gathered the apples in piles—striped red Northern spies, big greenings, golden russets and dark crimson wine-saps—spicy heaps of fragrance perfuming the whole countryside? And hadn't they brought in from the frost-covered fields the great orange spheres that, by a wave of Dicey's magic wand, were soon to be transformed into the pie of pies—delectably flaky and golden brown!

A lovely clinging, cottony snow had fallen the night before, mantling with glistening grace the bare-limbed trees and hardy weeds, and sifting an extra layer on the fields that had disappeared under the first heavy snowstorm two weeks before.

After the old-time Colonial dinner at home, there was to be an evening Thanksgiving entertainment at the church. Shirley, dressed as Rachel, the Quakeress, was to sing with Will Walter, "Reuben, Reuben, I've Been Thinking." Madge was to recite the opening to "Hiawatha," and Doris was to tell to a group of children her newest story, "The Passport to Fairyland." Best of all, those taking part were going to be allowed to "sit up" till ten o'clock—a rare treat to the little early-go-to-bedders.

All their parts had been carefully rehearsed to Louise Ward, who gave them many a helpful hint, and declared that she enjoyed her private rehearsal far better than she could the real programme in the church.

"Just the same, Louise," said Doris to her devoted friend, "I wish you were going with us, and I just hate to leave you here alone, especially without your new crutches."

"It won't be the first time, Dee Dee, and I really don't mind it a bit. I shall be safely tucked into bed before Mrs. Mudge starts for the entertainment. My dear little Polly Parrot that I brought back from the Centennial will probably talk me to sleep, as usual, and if Grandpa happens to come home before I drowse off, I know that he will come in to tell me all about his trip and to show me my new crutches. It has been the realest

Thanksgiving I have known for many a year," she sighed happily.

"Why do you say that when you can't go to the entertainment?" Madge asked.

" 'Why'? Because to-morrow I begin to walk with a crutch. Just think of that! And if all goes well, I shall be able to celebrate Christmas Day by walking without it. It has been a real Thanksgiving for Grandpa, too! It has made me happy to see how happy he has been to think that he has finished at last the book that he took to the publishers yesterday. He packed up all his other books and reference papers and left them at the express office, and we shall find them at Hartley when we get there in January. Lovely as this old ramshackle place is in summer, it is about impossible to heat in winter, and I am glad that, after we leave, it is to be torn down to make room for our new home. By the way, Madgie, Grandpa left a Thanksgiving present for you in the room across the hall. It's marked 'Miss Madge Brook.' Run over and get it, because he'll be sure to ask me if I gave it to you."

Madge raced across, glad to get another glimpse of the fascinating ugly old parlor with its stuffed birds, its what-not with trays of shells, its piles of daguerreotypes, and its quaint books now tied in a package for "Miss Brook." The room was at present almost dismantled, for Dicey had been

told to help herself to anything in it that struck her fancy as furnishing for her cabin. Nothing loath, she had taken over a wheelbarrow load of the *objets d'art* of the period—a God Bless Our Home motto worked in shaded red worsted and framed in rustic wood, a few waxwork pond lilies under a bell glass reposing on a “moss” mat tied in several shades of green yarn, a spatter-work cross growing out of a bank of ferns, an “air-castle” dingle-dangling from the chandelier.

This last monstrosity, made of numberless swinging cubes of silver cardboard worked in blue zephyr, was the apple of Dicey's eye. How Mrs. Deane had laughed when she saw the transported things with which the old servitor had decorated her cabin! “Oh, Dicey, Dicey, you are surely the original magpie!” And Madge who had rather enviously assisted Dicey across with her treasure trove, now laughed in sympathy. She was just wondering if she could gather up for the old cook the coveted fleet of crocheted tidies, when there came the call:

“Hurry up, Madge! It's time to start.”

So, grasping her precious books, Madge bounded back to Louise's room just as Doris was saying to her:

“Well, be sure, if you can't go to sleep, not to blow out the candle on your bed stand, and I'll come right in and tell you all about it. Mother

said I might, to help you celebrate your wonderful Thanksgiving. Good-night, Louise dear. We're all so *glad* for you! I'll watch for your light and be sure to come in and tell you a tuck-in story, if I see it." And with a pat and a kiss she hurried after the others.

"Good-night! Mind your manners!" croaked pretty Polly from her perch.

The Deanes' part in the entertainment, needless to say, turned out to be a great success. In the "Reuben and Rachel" song, the slightness of Shirley's voice was more than offset by her charming coquetry of manner; and Will Walter's utter absence of theatric effort was more than offset by the compelling charm of his unusual voice. To the little Deanes, the evening had but one drawback—neither Father nor Mother could be there to see how ably their three eldest daughters fulfilled their parts. Father had gone with Doctor Ward to look up some legal matters, and as they had evidently been detained, Mother thought it best to stay home with the other four.

As soon as Shirley had shed her charmingly becoming Quakeress costume, the children started homeward, Will Walter dragging Madge, still clutching her package of books, on her sled.

"I was so afraid you'd get rattled, Dee Dee, I am glad it's all over."

"So am I," and Doris sighed happily. "At first

I was afraid, too, when I saw all those eyes staring at me, but I became so intent on making those darling little children interested that I forgot myself entirely. Now we must watch for Louise's light. We can see it as soon as we get around the bend of the hill."

"I see it!" cried Madge.

"That's at the back of the house, goosie!" said Will Walter. "Louise's room is at the front, and there is no light there. She must be asleep."

"But that light is flickering around, Will." And Shirley stopped, greatly puzzled. "Do you think, Dee Dee, that perhaps Doctor Ward has come home, and is carrying a lamp about and packing more things?"

"No, I don't. It looks to me—why!—it looks like a fire starting in the back part of the house!"

"It is, too!" And Will Walter instantly took command. "Shirley," he shouted, "run back to the church quick and tell everybody you can find! Dee Dee, run to that nearest house and ask them to drive to Sharon to get the fire company. Madge, you run straight home, and ask your mother to get a place ready for Louise. I'll bring her right over." And throwing himself "belly-bumper" on the sled, Will slid swiftly down the long hill.

As he neared the foot, he could hear Lord Jim, the peacock, squawking his long discordant warn-

ings from the nearby tree in which he always roosted. As the boy ran up the path to the darkened house, he realized that Doctor Ward could not have returned, and so the door must still be left unlocked for him. Bursting into the front hall, he called Louise as gently as his excitement would permit. The hall was thick with smoke, but so far the flames that he could plainly hear roaring at the back, had not broken through.

Again he called. Perhaps she was already smothered by the smoke. "Louise, Louise, wake up!"

"What is it, Grandpa?" came sleepily from the next room. By this time, Will was becoming oppressed for breath, as he groped for the door. There was no time to lose.

"Cover your head up with that afghan, Louise. The house is on fire, and I am going to carry you, covers and all, over to the Deanes." And throwing open the two doors, he picked up the helpless girl and staggered out with her, putting her gently down on the sled and tucking the covers around her as best he could. By that time the wind-blown firebrands were falling around them thick and fast. The sky was alight with the flames from the back, and the voices of neighbors were heard shouting in the distance.

"Oh, Will, can't you get Polly, too? I hate to leave her there in her cage."

"We'll get you over safely first, and then see," said Will, grimly dodging the flying cinders and tugging at the sled.

As soon as he could leave the girl in the care of Mrs. Deane and Dicey, he tore back to the house that in the rear was blazing like a tinder box. Groping his way again to Louise's room, he jerked Polly's cage from its hook, threw over it the first cloth he could grab, and started out. As he reached the front door, something fell on his foot, pinning him to the floor. Hurling the cage as far as he could, and painfully wrenching his foot free, he struggled, blinded by the smoke, out into the fresh air, staggered forward several yards, and then fell into a snowbank softened by the surrounding heat.

As Polly's cage went hurtling through the air, the cloth flew off, and she landed on a big scraggly bush nearly buried in the snow shoveled from the front path. Her cries of "Polly's cold! Polly's cold!" attracted the attention of the first men to reach the scene, who promptly rescued her and consigned her to Shirley's eager hands. Rushing into Louise's room, the neighbors were able to bring out a few armfuls of clothes and books, but nothing else.

Soon afterward they found the unconscious boy sunk deep in the snowdrift—just in time, too! For it was utter folly to try to bring anything more

out from the doomed house, and the burning shingles were falling thick around them as they struggled to rescue the unfortunate Will. His clothes were providently drenched by the melting snow, or he would have been burned beyond help. As it was, his ankle was found to be broken, and there was grave danger—from exposure—of a return of the trouble from which he had recently recovered.

Meanwhile, the fire company had come dingling down the hill and, finding the house a hopeless blaze, had concentrated its energies on Tuckaway House across the way. Although the wind seemed to be shifting, it was necessary to keep its roof drenched, and also the roof of the House of the Three Bears—for at any minute they might catch fire from the flaming embers sometimes drifting in that direction.

In the midst of the excitement arrived Doctor Ward and Mr. Deane, in the greatest anxiety over the fate of their families. Suddenly, as often mysteriously happens at fires, the wind definitely shifted, the burned house fell in, and the flames now blew steadily back toward the river.

After the danger had subsided and the red-shirted firemen in their heavy helmets had enjoyed the coffee and johnnycake prepared for them by Dicey, they pulled their clanging engines back to Sharon. On their way home, they passed Doctor

Brandon driving out with the ambulance from the Sharon hospital.

After setting Will's ankle, the doctor insisted upon taking the boy to his own home. "I can get a good nurse there—two, if needed; and it will be necessary for him to be where I can see him several times a day. The boy has an iron constitution, and will probably pull through again. But this exposure, coming so soon after his other illness, threatens very serious consequences. I suppose it is hardly necessary to ask his aunt's permission, but perhaps I'd better notify her that it will be necessary to take the boy into town. I wouldn't leave the meanest thing alive to her care in that cheerless house!"

Will's aunt, greatly frightened by the threatened danger to the property, was fairly civil for her, and inwardly relieved to have the care of the injured boy taken out of her hands. So he was placed on a hospital cot that was carefully lifted and shoved into the ambulance and driven away. Doctor Brandon went with his patient, leaving Mr. Deane to drive Doctor Ward and Louise to the Sharon Hotel.

Greatly overwrought by the excitement, and in what Polly called "the dimmallest depths of depression," the children at midnight were getting ready for bed.

"And we all thought this morning that we had

so much to be thankful for," sobbed mercurial Madge, "and *now* just look at us!"

"Well, I think we still have a great deal to be thankful for," soothed Doris. "We are all alive and well, and the wind changed just in time to save this house and the 'House of the Three Bears.' We ought to be thankful that we came home early enough to spy the fire in time for Will to get Louise out."

"But Will may die from lying so long in the snowbank after what he has just got well of! I heard Doctor Brandon say so, Dee Dee! And his ankle's broken, too."

"Doctor Brandon won't let him die, Madgie. Stop crying, dear, and go to sleep! I'm so proud of him for doing what he did! Didn't you think that he made a splendid Reuben, Shirley?"

But Shirley didn't answer. She was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHRISTMAS IN THE AIR

THE nicest thing about Thanksgiving," exclaimed Madge, "is that you can go to sleep thinking Thanksgiving, and just naturally wake up thinking Christmas! But . . . I'm beginning to feel creepy, like it was going to be, maybe, the saddest Christmas we've ever known."

"Oh, why, Madgie? Christmas just couldn't be sad!"

"Well," replied Madge thoughtfully, "of course, I know it seems as if Christmas is bound to be jolly if only because it's Christmas—but—s'posen—just s'posen it's got to be our only Christmas at Tuckaway House, it seems as though _____"

" 'Twill be the saddest, maddest day
Of all the sad New Year, ' "

finished Shirley. "But don't let's s'posen till we have to. We must get on with our present-making, anyhow, and try to make it the best ever."

In the Deane household, Christmas activities

generally began with secret councils, with bits of handiwork whisked out of sight, with the clinking of pennies laboriously shaken from little iron banks, with waylaying Father to see if he had brought home sundry scraps of worsted and ribbon (for Father's clerk was a wonderful bargain hunter for little folks), and with constant planning for the December shopping day in the big city twenty miles away.

Two little girls were allowed each year to go with Mother on this great adventure. This year it was Shirley's and Madge's turn; so for weeks beforehand their expectations stood a-tiptoe, and for months afterward their thoughts were a swirling kaleidoscope of happy memories. Before daybreak, they were in their best Scotch plaid dresses, waiting for breakfast. When it came, they could hardly eat a mouthful, because, as Dicey said, they were too "journey-proud." At last came *the* moment—while Mother was putting on her Paisley shawl and tying her bonnet with broad ribbons under her chin—the moment for the little journey-prouds to don their velveteen coats lined with red flannel and adorned with brass buttons. Next came their little gray-and-white squirrel tippets, and black velvet bonnets. These last were very wonderful affairs framed inside with a becoming quilling of white net dotted with tiny pink rosebuds. Shirley's was carefully tied

under her saucy chin, with one of her coppery curls hanging out each side. Madge's stiff hair was brushed out of sight and forgotten, all the interest centering in the eager face and sparkling eyes framed by her velvet poke.

Last but not least came their green kid gloves. Yes, green kid gloves, bright green, too! My, how they hated them, and to what subterfuges they had resorted to get out of wearing them, forgetting them, losing them, but to no purpose! Back they always came with a grin and a jibe.

"Why, oh, why, did Ramona's mother send us such bitter green things?" moaned Shirley, tossing the despised articles into the corner of the room. "I don't care if Aunt Prudence Suzanne did say that they were the latest things in Paris, I'm sure everybody on Broadway will be grinning at them all day long!"

"Many a Little Wanderer would be glad to get 'em," sniffed Dicey. "You could pass 'em on to Polly, I reckon, and Marse Jawge'd git you a new pair for the price of yore railroad ticket to-day." Then, noting the look of alarm sweeping across the disconsolate little face, she added: "Ah, go on, and don't think so much of yore clothes, you airified Shirley, you! I reckon you won't be the only one in York's House that p'r'aps ain't rigged up jest as she'd like to be. Look at yore ma, now!

Three years come New Year, Miss Doris has worn that same bugled black velvet bunnit with never a whimper!"

"Yes, but she's old!" protested Shirley with the unconscious hardness of youth. "When you get old, it don't make any difference *what* you wear!"

Dicey glared at the child with whom she had had many a verbal skirmish. Though often exulting in her pertness, she always felt bound to snub it. "It don't, hey? When you gits old yore ownself, Miss Sassbox, you'll find that the older you gits, the more diffrunce it *does* make. And mark my words, no lady what *is* a lady ever *quite* gits her mind above her bunnit! . . . Run along now, and make yore hands help yore ma all you can without thinking about what's a-covering of 'em!"

From the very start, every moment was a thrill, every stage of the journey a magic milestone—the drive to the station, wheels creaking with the cold; the roar of the oncoming train, emitting sparks and steaming, grinding and clanking to a standstill just to take them on and away to the wonder city; the trains whizzing by their "local express," making them jump in their seats; the tang of the sea brought by the stiff breezes on the ferryboat; the dodging of the great Normandy draft horses dragging drayloads of boxes; the warm, stimulat-

ing odors of roasting coffee, and the bumpy ride in the lumbering Broadway stage.

"Just look, Madge," said Shirley who had lurched over the haycovered floor to the front of the stage so as to drop their fares into the little glass receiver, "see the way the driver has that leather strap around his foot connecting with the door, so when a passenger gets in or out and pulls the door, he is really pulling the man's leg!"

"And see how he pokes the change down through that little slide back of him!" Madge's voice was keyed high with excitement. "I wouldn't like to drive a two-horse stage on a cold day up Broadway and make change, and keep track of whether people I couldn't see had paid their fare or not, would you? . . . What? . . . Oh, goody of goodies! Mother says we're almost to Stewart's! I just love to go to Mr. A. T. Stewart's store with the great rotunda in the middle where the brocaded silks, like fairy princesses must have worn, are hanging from the balconies!"

The rocking stage drove up to the curb. Madge excitedly pushed and held the door wide open, forgetful of the strain upon the driver's upraised leg, while a man in claret-colored uniform, as big as Giant Despair, haughtily helped Mother to alight; and at last, oh, joy of joys, their Christmas shopping day had really begun!

The morning was generally devoted to shopping for necessary clothing, flannel petticoats, hoods, mittens, and scarfs which were gladly given and accepted in the Deane family, in the guise of Christmas gifts.

Father joined them at noon and allowed the children to order whatever they wanted for lunch. Madge nearly paralyzed the waiter by her prompt call for hard-boiled eggs and bread-and-molasses—two dainties which Dicey never permitted in her cuisine—topping off with frozen custard. Shirley's order, after a frank hunt through the menu for "whatever isn't good for me" produced quite as startling an effect. Then she capriciously changed her mind, deciding that "for once in her life" she'd have enough oysters, beginning with six mammoth raw ones, going on to an oyster stew, and taking a dish of fried ones for dessert. By the time these brown smoking bits of plumpness arrived, she began to realize that her eyes had been bigger than her palate, and was only too glad to transfer three of the lemon-garnished morsels to Madge's clean-swept plate.

After lunch, Mr. Deane always offered to take the children to make their little purchases for one another. It was fortunate that Father was a famous accountant, for no one else could so well have straightened out the frenzied finance of his offspring. Each started out with a scrawled list of

commissions prepared by the stay-at-homes; but the little shoppers saw everywhere so many unthought-of things that seemed much better than the articles originally planned for, that it required many doublings up, scratchings out and general redistribution of their limited funds, necessitating expert assistance to decipher these tangled penny accounts.

Then, too, it was generally understood that now was the time to select the combination present for Mother, the gift about which so many plans had been made and unmade during the year. To-day they decided upon an individual tea set and tray on which they could serve her meals when she happened to have one of her severe sick headaches.

While the girls were selecting this daintily flowered set, Mother, of course, was attending to their purchases for Father. Mr. Deane was not one of those men who when asked what they want for Christmas, reply in a bored way, "Oh, a cake of soap or a toothbrush—whichever I didn't get last year." Instead, he took the matter most seriously, and conscientiously placed his list—headed "Father's Dollar Desires"—with the others in the holiday list, book kept hanging by the fireside during December. Mother had studied it pretty thoroughly, and as soon as her family were out of sight, headed for the book counter. That was the time of times to look leisurely over the attractive

stock and make a selection that she knew would please her husband, and come somewhat as a surprise, too.

When the group was again united, came the witching hour of the day—four o'clock! Then Father took the girls outside of the store-of-the-star, and left them in a safe place where they could delight in the doll pageant that filled the spacious shop window. Oblivious of everything around them, they viewed—with the throngs from far and near, the rich and the poor, the young and the old from all classes and conditions of life—the magic figures arranged before a snowy mountainside.

“Oh, Shirley, Shirley, I just can't believe it's all come true again!” glowed Madge, her face sparkling and dimpling in an instant. “Just look at those Italian dolls with tambourines, Uncle Tom with his banjo—and—and——” but words failed even Madge, and the big-eyed children were content to stare trancedly at the glittering spectacle.

Such an array!—capering clowns, music-box fairy dolls, waving their star-tipped wands to tinkling notes; slant-eyed Japs in gold-embroidered robes; pig-tailed Chinamen; fur-clad Russian ladies in sleighs, with men on skates behind them to push; Spanish señoritas with flashing eyes, tucking carnations into their black lace mantillas; darling little Dutch dolls with white-

winged caps; blanketed Indian squaws with their cunning little papooses; baby dolls, mother dolls, grandmother dolls—the loveliest in the world to the fascinated watchers.

It was not because they were dolls that Shirley and Madge were so thrilled by this spectacular display; for dolls, as such, were too unresponsive to hold the interest of the Deanelets long. But this was more than doll-dom! No, it was the whirling pageantry of life that was stimulating their imaginations and transporting them to far-away lands. Some day, perhaps, like these puppets, they, too, might be skating past windmills on Holland's frozen dykes, or gathering chrysanthemums in Japan, or watching the gypsies dance in the Alhambra!

They came back to earth with a start when they realized that Father and Mother, laden down with bundles, were standing, smiling quietly, beside them. That meant homeward bound! Father had marked every package when wrapped, had several tied together whenever possible, had stowed many little things into his pockets, had a bundle of bundles for each child to carry, had filled Mother's satchel to overflowing, had taken the lion's share of parcels for himself—and then, away they all went! Back again in the clumpity-clumping Broadway stage, back to the deliciously coffee-perfumed streets, over on the ferryboat

where the horses were stamping and jingling their harness, again on the train, watching the fitful lights in dark towns fly past their windows, pounding down the hard highway toward home—Home, HOME! HOME! the dearest little home in all the hills!

While the four members of the Deane family had been adventuring in the mazes of the wonder city, Dicey had been marshaling the home squad, and making a regular picnic of it, too.

Those who helped by carrying in the wood or by sweeping and dusting the playroom were allowed to grease the patty pans, to whip the eggs into froth, to roll and cut out the cakes, or to fashion them into puffy dough babies with apple-seed eyes, to give to their friends.

Those who seeded raisins, several cups full, were permitted to fill special saucer pies for their best-loved playmates.

Those who shelled the baskets of popcorn were allowed to pop it to the tune of "Pop goes the weasel," and make it into toothsome, sticky balls for the Christmas stockings and the church Christmas box, wrapping each ball in waxed paper to keep it fresh.

Dicey, meanwhile, was stirring up a deliciously fragrant mixture that was to appear later in the

form of the droll gingerbread brownies for which she was so famous.

This remarkable old cook had engineered these preparatory Christmas days for many years, feeding her helpers well, keeping them good-tempered and eager to help, and always accomplishing an enormous amount of pre-holiday work before the return of the shoppers. Dicey was one of those natural psychologists—although she would have repudiated the name as something connected with the black art—that had a knack of managing her ambitious little band so that they counted the tasks of that busy day in her spicy, cosy kitchen as a treat second only to that enjoyed by the shoppers in the city of adventure.

“‘Oh, here’s richness!’” quoted Polly as she gazed admiringly at the mouth-watering result of the day’s work. “I wish we could do something to show Father and Mother how much we appreciate all the good things and times they give us at Christmas! I know! I’ll teach the twinnikins to walk!”

For some days past, both Prue and Sue had been drawing themselves up to chairs, and even walking around them, but all the beguilements of the family had failed to induce them to forsake their firm support. It needed someone of Polly’s persistent persuasiveness to cajole them into taking the step that counts. Patiently she walked Prue

up and down, holding on tight to her tiny hand and gaining her confidence every time they turned around. Then leaving the baby standing laughing in the middle of the room, she popped down before her, held out a new rattling toy that she had intended giving her for Christmas, and almost before she knew it, Prue had taken two steps alone and was caught up in Polly's delighted arms. While the child was still laughing, she did it again, and on the third trial, made four steps without any difficulty. By that time, Sue was fretting at seeing her twin absorbing all the family attention, and was only too willing to "copy-cat" her sister's success.

"Keep 'em at it for ten minutes, Polly, and they'll just nache'llly walk all the rest of their lives. And then, put them to bed before Marse Jawge and Miss Doris gits back, so's to surprise them in the morning."

By the time the toddlers were suppered and undressed, it was almost the hour to look out for the travelers.

"Ah, Dicey, let me keep the twins up just ten minutes longer," coaxed Polly. "They're in their canton flannel night drawers with feet in them, you know, so they won't catch cold! And Father and Mother and the girls will be *so* surprised to see Prue and Sue walking that they will forget how tired they are!"

And so it happened that when the shoppers, a few minutes later, came crunching up the path, they saw a row of ten expectant eyes and five flattened little noses against the window pane.

"Quick, Dee Dee! Put the big chairs facing the door into their room!" And catching up Prue and Sue, Polly darted into the next room with them, calling back, "Then stand behind Father and Mother and call the twins."

The impromptu programme worked out to a nicety. Mother sank into one of the chairs so invitingly placed, and was untying her bonnet strings when she noticed that the door opening into the next room had been left ajar. Just as she was about to ask Doris to close it to keep out the noise from the inevitable crowding chorus of questions, there was a scurry, a suppressed chuckle, some baby giggles, a shout of triumph followed by a sudden hush as the door slowly swung wide open, and two tiny curlyheads came toddling out, slowing down, hesitating and regaining courage till, with a final swift rush, they each gained a parent's knee. Cuddled and tossed, and again exhibited to their hearts' content, the twins submitted to a violent flurry of kisses from Madge, had a tiny peppermint popped into their mouths as a special reward of merit from Shirley and, having fully convinced the family that they were up and

coming youngsters, were triumphantly borne cribward by Father.

Such mysteries as followed after the exit of the twins, in giving the right bulky bundle to the right person! Madge had insisted upon hiding the little things that she had bought with her own money in her usual safe deposit, thrusting them into her stockings before she entered the house. But, alas! owing to her chronically garterless condition, she soon shed her purchases all around the room, and like the beautiful Bertha, the princess who could be traced by the pearls that she dropped, Madge's course could be followed by the mysterious little packages popping from their hiding places.

"My! My! MY!" groaned Shirley as she flung herself wearily into bed, "I feel as poor as Poverty's kitchen to-night, but I am so happy with my blissful Christmas secrets, and I'd like to do it all over again!"

"Tuckaway House is certainly crammed to the explosion point with its mysteries to-night," agreed Doris, yawning. "I know twenty right this minute!"

"Well, I hope you won't spontaneously combustify," drawled Polly drowsily, as she cuddled close up to her.

CHAPTER XIX

CHRISTMAS EVE

IN THE Deane household, Christmas-tide, like "all Gaul," was divided into three parts, each so overflowing with happiness that it was quite impossible to know which part was the favorite. First, there was Christmas Eve with the palpitating flurry of final preparations, the carols, and the scurrying to bed with everyone agog with a lively sense of expectancy. Next was the mysterious Christmas Dawn followed by the daylong delight which stocking and tree afforded. And last of all was the blessed Christmas Night with the comfy after-dinner candlelight shining on the big joke stocking hanging from the chandelier.

Everything was ready at last! The atmosphere was electric with excitement! Wreaths, made of the ground pine that the children had gathered in the woods, hung at all the windows and over the brass knocker on the front door. Ramona had come for the holidays bringing with her many bulging bundles. Everybody's stocking, even Dicey's great hose and the twins' little socks, had been hung on the chimney-piece in the playroom. Christmas Eve was really there.

On that night it was customary to have an early supper by the log fire in the living room. Instead of the everyday bread-and-milk, there was popcorn served with cream and eaten from a glass saucer with a spoon; shared with Father and Mother, it always seemed to have a special Christmas relish. Perhaps they all ate with such zest in the consciousness that the last bit of childish preparation was over, the last little homemade present tied and labeled—not as we do it nowadays, for Christmas wrapping had not then been commercialized. No tissue paper, seals, and ribbons to adorn a package one minute only to be thrown into the scrap basket the next, but gifts tucked into envelopes or encased in homespun wrappings that had so much love packed in with them that the tinsel tyings were never missed.

While all the mysterious little secrets connected with the presents had been delightful to keep, it was now a relief to feel that soon they would be common property.

"I know now," sighed Madge happily, "how a kernel of corn must feel just before it is going to pop. I couldn't stand it much longer!"

"But one more night,
To-morrow white,"

chirped Shirley.

After supper the big candle was lit and placed in the window for the coming of the Christ-child. Then they gathered around the hearth for their celebration. Led by Madge, they all recited in spirited unison "'Twas the night before Christmas." Then, after the laughter had quieted down, Father read to them selections from the dearest little story book in the world, "A Christmas Carol." How they loved and blessed Charles Dickens, always associating his spirit-stirring tale with the fragrance of bayberry candles and the leaping flames of their own hearth fire!

"Oh, I just love that Christmas ghost story!" Madge bubbled over. "I don't know any story that makes me feel so good inside of me, and want to do some good Christmas good to others!"

After the lamp was extinguished and they were all settling down for their candlelight carol service, there was a great commotion outside, and Dicey entered fairly dragging in Will Walter.

"I kotched him hanging round the windows," she announced triumphantly; "so I jest made him come along in and jine the fambly and hear Miss Doris play on the old what-jer-call-'em."

Dee Dee quietly took a cushion and sat on the floor so that there would be a vacant seat for the newcomer.

"I'm not going to stay," protested the boy, angrily wrenching himself out of Dicey's grip. "I

didn't mean to break in! I was just going to listen to the carols that Madge told me you were going to sing, because I hadn't heard any—in years."

"You're just the chap I was wanting to help another man out," was Mr. Deane's greeting, "and put some more logs on the fire for me, won't you, please? Can you manage to bring in one or two of those heavy ones from the porch?"

After Will had finished putting the firewood in place, Mrs. Deane drew him down into the chair that Doris had vacated, and Elizabeth, running across the room and giving him the uneaten side of her apple to bite, climbed up on his knee saying, "Call me that name you youth to call me."

"What was that?"

"You know, Mith Lithabeth Whithabeth Curly-head Deane."

"Well, Mith Lithabeth Whithabeth Curly-head Deane," laughed Father, "now that we are all ready, we'll let you choose the first carol."

"All right, 'I Think when I Read that Thweet Thtory of Old.'"

"That isn't a Christmas carol," teased Shirley.

"It has the Christmas spirit, though," said Mother. "We'll sing it, anyhow."

And they did it beautifully. Mr. and Mrs. Deane had unusually sympathetic voices. Doris sang a pleasant alto to Shirley's sweet soprano; they all had a good sense of time, and their clear,

childish voices rendered the carols with spirit and reverence. Will, now completely at ease, joined in as a matter of course, and Elizabeth, snuggling confidingly up to him, soon went peacefully off to sleep.

Before coming to Tuckaway House, Mrs. Deane's old Chickering piano that she had had when a girl had been moved around to her various homes and used as an accompaniment to the family sing. But it had finally become so dilapidated, and had proved such a Jumbo to transport, that it had been decided not to attempt to transfer it to Sharon County. Realizing what a cross it must have been for her Miss Doris to leave behind this faithful childhood friend, and to have nothing for the home concerts, Dicey had unearthed from the "poke-hole" in the loft above her cabin a strange, wheezy old instrument. It seemed to be a kind of melodeon with ivory keys, yet with accordion bellows worked by the elbows. Mrs. Deane thought that she could never learn to manage the awkward thing, but she mastered its mysteries at last, to the great rejoicing of Dicey, who took more pleasure in watching her mistress's dexterity in "manipulatin' the kuhflewidgeon" than she could possibly have had in a great cathedral organ.

It served its purpose admirably for all the carols. Next came, "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,"

"Beautiful Morning Star," "We Three Kings of Orient Are," ending with Doris's favorite, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

Then came Father's and Mother's eagerly awaited part. On Christmas Eve they always sang together, to the children's unbounded delight, some of the quaint old carols from foreign lands—Noëls from the Tyrol, Russia, France, England, and Strasbourg.

First Mrs. Deane played the old Norwegian Noël that the children loved because of its lullaby. They did not know the words well, but Will evidently did, and sang right on with the older folk, evidently retracing very familiar steps:

"O'er a crib the Mother bending,
In the silence of the night,
While the angels glad were singing
And the Star shed wondrous light,
Sang a lullaby so tender
Hushed to sleep a little Child
(Lullaby, Lullaby)
Christ the Lord is born to-night!"

In the next carol, the tempo was greatly accelerated and the rhythm changed, but Will sang surely on, unconscious of everything but the old days when his mother had taught him to sing with her these carols quaint. It was his own mother that

he was seeing clearly while singing of the one by the manger.

When they came to the Noël from France, Mr. Deane made a sign to his wife and stopped singing after the first few lines. Although continuing to play softly, Mrs. Deane also dropped out at the end of the first stanza, but Will went on, so absorbed in the memories that the song recalled that he did not realize that he was singing alone.

“Come, my heart, then singing go,
In thee love divine shall glow
Till thou weep no more!
Mary is the mother,
Jesus thy dear brother,
Come from heaven above
Just to teach thee love.

The angels in heaven all have sung Noël,
And earth's choiring voices the chorus shall swell
Noël! Noël! Sing we all Noël!”

As the last triumphant Noëls rang out clear and strong, showing what a powerful voice the rapt singer had, tears sprang to the eyes of the sensitive children. Their parents were deeply moved, too, and Mr. Deane said rather huskily, “Now we'll have our good-night song, ending as we always do, with the loveliest carol in the world—‘Holy Night.’ ”

"I choose to blow out the candles," exclaimed Madge—for she was never long touched to joy or sorrow.

Her bustling around the room roused Elizabeth, who from babyhood had always had the trick of waking wide awake, simply opening her big blue eyes to their full width and smilingly picking up life just where she had dropped it when dozing off. So now she suddenly sat up straight, shook the curls out of her eyes, and smiling at everybody said:

"And tho, ath Tiny Tim obtherved, 'God bleth uth every one!' "

Smiling tenderly on the much-loved little sister, the others became hushed in the darkening room. And in the firelit dusk they all sang softly, with the beautiful earnestness of childhood, "Silent Night"—the carol that best brings home to the heart the sweet solemnity of Christmas.

CHAPTER XX

CHRISTMAS DAWN

CHRISTMAS Eve had been much as usual with the unexpected addition of Will Walter's contribution to the carol service; but Christmas Day was going to be different and "more surprisey," as Madge said, than any that the little Deanes had ever known. It began to be surprisey at the first streak of dawn and kept it up till the last candle flickered out on Christmas night.

Father and Mother began it by getting up first. Generally, the children had been allowed to steal out of bed before daybreak, take their clothes in their arms and grope their way whisperingly down to the playroom. There, by the light of the double row of red isinglass eyes in "The Old Salamander," they had dimly made out, as they dressed, the outlines of the great tree in the corner and had discerned the knobbiness of the bulgy stockings hanging behind the stove.

But to-day! Well, it was cold enough to justify Father in getting the old two-decker to roaring cheerily and the lamp burning brightly before the first piping "Merry Christmas" was heard in the

room above. Excited little folk were hardly to be trusted with lamps, so Mother lit the one upstairs and helped the youngest scurry into their clothes, while Father attended to some unusually important matters below.

"Don't you peek into your stocking, Dad-dums," called Polly down the register.

"Can't hold out but five minutes longer, Tortums," came the answer back. "Think you can all make it by that time?"

Indeed they could! And even before the time was up, down they all came scampering, and began the high-keyed, happy chorus that well repaid Mother and Father for the hours spent in dressing the tree and stretching their small income over the big framework of a large family.

Was there *ever* any fragrance quite equal to that Christmassy blend of balsam fir and pine, wintergreen and peppermint candy, all mingled with the spicy redolence of gingerbread!

There certainly never was such a beauty of a Christmas tree! Everybody ran to it, even before examining the stockings. Father had found it first and cut it for them *in their own wood*, and they had all dragged it home over the snow the week before. But now! it looked again as it did when they first saw it, white and glisteny! Even lovelier! For long after the Deanelets were cosily asleep on Christmas Eve, Father, Mother, and

Dacey had spent much time and energy in decorating it for them. Father had bought at the printer's half a ream of glossy, oiled white paper sheets that he had cut into numberless mazy cobwebs of fine strips thrown all over the tree and dripping like frozen moss from its boughs. Wads of the gleaming paper in the crotches of the tree looked like great blobs of frozen snow or, piled up below, like miniature ice blocks waiting for a spring thaw. Masses of cotton here and there completed the snowy illusion, and numberless transparent icicles, tinkling, dingling bits of glass and crystal spangles added their frigid lustre. Pine cones dipped in whitewash hung from the branches every one of which was tipped with a kernel of popcorn. Tiny, glazed white cornucopias swayed and twinkled from the frosty twigs, and sprinklings of "diamond dust" completed the sparkling, fairy brilliancy. A shimmering silvery star shone from the topmost point, and two tiny ruby lanterns, cunningly concealed, sent out a rosy glow from the heart of the wonder-tree.

"It stands for all the majesty and purity of Christmas, doesn't it, Mother?" said Shirley who was quickly touched to beauty in every form; "just the way the carols and what we give, stand for the Christmas spirit!"

"It's so sparkly it makes me catch my breath. I never, never, *never* saw anything so lift-up-y!

But what's all that underneath?" And Madge pointed to the base of the tree.

That was the next great surprise, Ramona's contribution. One day last summer she had happened to tell Aunt Doris about the way that they celebrated Christmas in Spain—not with trees and trinkets, but with family feasting and Nativity toys set out to represent the first Christmas. She had brought her set with her in a trunk that had not been unpacked during the summer. Mrs. Deane, greatly interested, had asked her niece not to show it to her little cousins, but to save it for a surprise to put under the tree. So there it was, exquisitely and reverently made, worthy of the closer examination that the children were to be allowed to give it after breakfast.

But the greatest surprise of all struck the entire Deane family as they turned from the tree intending to examine their Christmas stockings. Mother began it with a long-drawn-out "Ah—h—h!" of delight as she turned questioningly to Father. Then the children saw what it was all about and wondered why they hadn't noticed it before. The bare old room now had some wonderful pieces of furniture in it that must have come in overnight—such a big motherly, slat-backed rocker next a fold-back mahogany table shining so that you could see your face in it. And in the living room was the most dignified old secretary, and a rolled-

arm sofa, and a low-boy, and a pie-crust table, and Windsor chairs, and dear little splint-bottomed ones, too!

"Oh, such beautiful, beautiful pieces! Where *did* you find them!" exclaimed Mother, her rosy cheeks flushing a still deeper pink with delight and astonishment.

"Out in the corncrib, Mrs. Shock-absorber," laughed Father. "For once, I got your Christmas without your even suspecting what it was! You see," he continued, "the more I thought about the furniture that must have been taken out of here, when the tenant turned these front rooms into a tobacco warehouse, the more I felt sure that he would not have dared to go so far as to sell the old family pieces. So I kept hunting around quietly till, one day, I spied a claw foot sticking out of the lumber in the corncrib. I got track of the key, looked the stuff over, and saw that it was well worth reclaiming even though so shockingly weatherworn."

"Oh, I see now!" exclaimed Madge. "That's why you locked us out of the harness room where you said you were doing some work. I remember a paintshoppy smell used to come out of the keyhole when I tried to look in!"

"Yes, Neighbor Jones helped me out there. He took some of the pieces at night over to his barn and repaired them, and hauled two pieces to a fin-

isher in Sharon. We rubbed up some of the others in our spare hours. And there's more still out there," he concluded enthusiastically, "some fine old beds and bureaus, when we find the time and money to refinish them."

While Father was giving this explanation, the children, like Goldilocks, were running around trying the chairs, and Mother was examining and enjoying to the full these new-old furnishings for her quaint little home.

"They suttinly is the livin'est-lookin' pieces I've seen for many a day," approved Dicey. "They shows the Quality you always was and *is*—Brek-fus' in twenty minutes, Marse Jawge."

With that, the children all flew to their Christmas stockings. From the top of each protruded the usual pink-and-white peppermint candy cane, hard and glistening, with wonderful wearing qualities. Gingerbread men, popcorn balls, candy animals, oranges, apples, and nuts gave the stockings their mysteriously knobby contour, and in between were tucked the little inexpensive gifts that gave so much pleasure—a game of Authors for Polly, a few gay buttons for Madge's memory-button string, some colored scrapbook pictures and decalcomania for Elizabeth's big blue book, a new hair ribbon for Shirley's curls, a combination ink-and-pencil-eraser for Dee Dee, and rattling bells for Prue and Sue.

Below the stockings were the larger packages—mostly useful articles and wearing apparel, mittens, hoods, handkerchiefs, scalloped flannel petticoats and rubber boots, but received as rapturously by the little Deanes as if they had been pearl necklaces or expensive toys. The three eldest children were greatly mystified by three barrel-shaped bundles that formed the foundations of their piles of gifts. They soon learned from the label that these were gifts from Aunt Prudence Suzanne, who had sent Ramona the money to buy whatever she thought her little cousins would most like. Remembering her last gift—the unbearable green kid gloves—the girls' hearts sank. They did not know that, after Ramona's written consultation with her Aunt Doris, these three small barrel-shaped bundles had appeared at the bank and been smuggled home by Father.

"What could they be!"

"I know," exclaimed Polly, "bird cages!"

"Guess again," laughed Dee Dee who by this time had got the lid off hers. "Muffs! Beautiful gray and white squirrel muffs to match our tippets!"

"They'll keep our fingers so warm we won't have to wear any gloves," exulted Shirley spinning around delightedly with both hands inside the precious gift, "and I just believe Mother——" Breaking off suddenly at a warning glance from

Dee Dee, she finished to herself, "And I just believe Mother coaxed Ramona to get the muffs on purpose to hide those awful green kid gloves! I wonder! Of course, Mother'd never let on for fear of hurting Aunt Prudence Suzanne's feelings about those Paddy-gloves, so I won't let on, either; but I'll see that there's nothing left of *my* pair when it comes time to put the muffs away!"

"But you haven't any of you seen my surprise for Father," said Mrs. Deane, proudly presenting a cherubic photograph of the twins.

With a strange look of pleasure and dismay, Mr. Deane took the proffered picture in one hand while he drew the other hand from his pocket, handing to his wife—a photograph of Prue and Sue that *he* had had taken as a Christmas surprise.

"Neither of us could have done it without dear old Dicey's help," laughed Mrs. Deane as the shouts subsided. "You kept your secrets well, Dicey."

"Yes, Miss Doris. You-all suttinly did keep me a-humping! But I thought it was better to have two sech grand pictures of the darlings than to let on to either of you what the other's surprise was."

"See, here's your present from us, Mother dear." Madge proudly put the tray of dainty dishes before her. "I do hope that you won't have a bad enough headache to need them soon, but

when you do, I choose to serve your first meal on them."

During the pleasure of giving and taking, while thanks and counter thanks were echoing and re-echoing through the room, many more delightful things came to light—the books for Father, the autograph album and little locket and chain for Ramona, and the big double-runner bob sled for the family, sent by the wards and named "Pheidippides," after the fleet Athenian courier. And oh, such a promising pile of books! Bound volumes of *The Nursery* and *Chatterbox* for the little ones; four lovely red books with gold morning glories on them—the first bound volumes of *St. Nicholas*—for the middlin'-sized ones; and "Tom Sawyer" and "Eight Cousins" for the oldest ones. And for the family, the renewal slip of the weekly story paper that promised them all fifty-two weeks of companionable happiness. *What* a feast of story-reading and story-telling these were going to supply, long after the excitement of Christmas Day should fade from their memories!

"Christmus gif'! Christmus gif' to all of you!" cried Dicey, contentedly gathering up the flannel-lined arctics, purple calico gown, knitted scarf, bottle of cologne, gay pictures, and scarlet leather pocketbook, containing the usual gold piece, that had fallen to her share. "Yore corn pone's a-steaming on the brekfus' table!"

And so, rather reluctantly, they all temporarily deserted their new treasures. The twins, still clasping their knit dolls, were tucked into their high chairs, one beside Father and the other beside Mother, while the rest, piling their things in separate corners, hurried to their places.

"Let's all sing grace this morning," suggested Doris.

"Yes, let's!" agreed Shirley, "to the same old tune, but I'll change the words to suit, this way:

"For Christmas Day, Our Father,
We lift our thanks to Thee!
We thank Thee for our Christmas gifts,
And for our Christmas tree!

Now!"

And so they all sang it, fervidly and reverently, from hearts overbrimming with happiness.

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTMAS NIGHT

WHILE still at breakfast, the Deane family was startled by a triple knock on the front door. Dashing out to see who their early visitor might be, Shirley came back with a letter in her hand.

"Nobody there! Just sleighbells jingling back up the hill, and this big envelope for 'Little Miss Quicksilver,' whoever that may be!"

"Oh, that's what Mr. Norton used to call me in the bank last summer because I rolled around so fast from one thing to another!" said Madge, excitedly tearing off the wrapper. "Beautiful fringed cards from Evelyn and Mildred for each one of us," she cried, hastily distributing them. They must be that new kind from London, made specially for Yuletide and called 'Christmas cards'—all sparkles and pictures and poetry and English scenes—regular Christmas valentines, aren't they, girls? And here's a sealed letter for you, Daddy."

Mr. Deane flushed as he read his letter, then took it around to his wife, who looked greatly

pleased while reading it. "May I read it to the children?" she asked. "I know that they will be very happy about it and share my pride in you, too." Then she read aloud:

"DEAR MR. DEANE:

"Rumors have reached the Directors of our Sharon Bank that you have been offered the position of Cashier of the City Bank at a much higher salary than you are receiving here. We had intended offering you a substantial advance in salary on the first of the year; but at a meeting of the Directors held yesterday afternoon, it was decided to send you informal word to-day that we do not wish to part with your valuable services and will take pleasure in increasing your salary to the sum offered you by the City Bank.

"Trusting that you will see your way to staying with us, and with cordial Christmas greetings to you and your family, I remain,

"Very sincerely yours,
"BENJAMIN NORTON."

"Three cheers for Daddums! Then we *will* stay at Tuckaway House, won't we? Isn't that the very nicest Christmas present you ever heard of!" And Madge capered around the room in high glee.

"Not so fast, Midget! There are other things to consider before we can fully decide. There is our little city house waiting for us, you know." Then seeing the downcast row of faces before him, Mr. Deane added as he made a special effort not to let his personal anxiety cloud the Christmas

gayety, "Suppose we try not to think about it till to-night! Mother and I will talk it over and let you know before we vote to-night."

But the surprises weren't all over yet! After a most satisfying morning, dipping into new treasures, admiring and readmiring the tree with all the welcome additions that Christmas had brought, the Deane children settled down to enjoying the new story books.

The twins were taking their morning nap. Father had gone into Sharon to bring Doctor Ward and his daughter out for the Christmas dinner that was to come in the late afternoon, and Mother was resting and rejoicing in the antiques that her husband's energy had salvaged and made so sightly. Each bit of soft, satiny finish in the rare, brownish mahogany that cannot be reproduced to-day, the Prince of Wales plume in the veneer, the smoldering fire in the old graining, the grace and strength of the Colonial construction—all these gratified an esthetic craving that had filled her beauty-loving, hungry soul for years, taking her back to the furnishings in her childhood home. Linking these happy Southern days with her children's merry hours in Tuckaway House, she drowsed off into one of the most blissful dozes she had known for many a long day.

Toward noontime, William strolled in. Dicey, in spite of his protests, insisted upon giving him

something to eat; for she had noticed that no smoke had come out of the 'Three Bears' chimney that morning, and she suspected that his breakfast had been very skimpy, if any. Elizabeth shyly offered him a lick of her candy, and, joining in the laugh that followed, Will soon began to feel at home—especially after examining, amid the sprightly comments of the band, the stocking that they had hung up and filled for him.

After that, they all enjoyed Ramona's description of the Nativity figures under the tree. While not interested in their doll-like appearance, as the younger ones were, nor at first impressed with the sentiment that they so naïvely expressed, Will was fascinated with the ingenuity and ingenuousness with which the scene was presented. Crudely constructed of cork, painted clay, and paper stiffened with paste, they represented with childish simplicity and weird little realistic touches, the figures associated with the legends of the birthday on the Judean plains so many centuries ago. Here were the three kings, their camels laden with gifts, coming over the cork hills, while the smuggler hid his booty from sight, and the hunter aimed at a partridge perched on a hermit's tower. Woolly lambs reposing in a green felt pasture near by staidly watched the advancing procession.

"Oh, just look at that cunning little donkey, piled high with firewood, going across that paper

bridge to the stable! The bridge is made of paper, colored and crumpled so that it looks just like stone, doesn't it?" And Polly fell on her knees to get a closer look at the clever construction.

"It makes me shiver so to look at the frost made of steel-dust sprinkled on the hills that I long to hold my hands close to the fire that the shepherds are building to warm the new-born baby! . . . And just look here! . . . Some of the shepherds are dancing with joy over the glad tidings!"

While Shirley was dancing in sympathy, matter-of-fact Polly was lifting the sheet of crystal representing the frozen river and examining the lifelike eels, crabs, and turtles disporting themselves below, and stroking very gently the little plaster birds of gay plumage perched on the small ever-green trees. And Doris was looking tenderly at the straw-thatched stable, the horned cattle in the shadows, and the light from the halos in the manger shining upon the angels and the children come to see the new baby. "I don't wonder you love it, Ramona," she said gently. "I'd carry it everywhere with me, too!"

"But where are the Christmas presents?" asked Madge. "I can't find them anywhere."

"Oh, in Spain we don't have presents on Christmas Day! We wait until the day when the Magi come to Bethlehem, on January sixth. Then we have the gifts that the Three Kings bring us!"

"But what *do* you have on Christmas Day, Ramona?"

"We have this Yule-tide Nativity and we have a wonderful family feast."

"So do we, so do we! And I am getting so hungry for it, I wish——"

"How would you all like to take your first coast on Pheidippides, to put an extra edge on your appetite?" suggested Will. "I have taken a crowd down Sharon Hill before this. May I take them all this morning, Mrs. Deane?"

"Yes, indeed! Doctor Ward said in the note that came with the double-runner that he had had you try it out last week while you were still at Doctor Brandon's, and that he could recommend you as a trustworthy steerer."

It didn't take the children long to get into their warm Christmas toggery and red mittens, and help drag the sled to the top of the hill. After a few breathless trips, all leaning to one side at Will's call when they took the hill curve, they began to feel like such experienced coasters that the older ones took a few lessons in steering. Just as they were about to take their last flyer, they heard shouts near them and turned to see Father driving Doctor Ward and Louise out to the Christmas dinner.

"Thank you—oh, thank you ever and ever so much for sending us dear old Pheidippides!" they

shouted jubilantly. "Did you see how he took that last hill?"

As it was beginning to get dark, dinner must be about ready; so, stowing Elizabeth cozily in between Louise and her grandfather, the others hitched the sled to the back of the sleigh and were drawn triumphantly home to the sound of old Manydays' jingling bells.

"Thank you very much!" said Madge, the first one off. "It was ever so kind of you to drag us home, but it wasn't really half so much fun as to coast, you know."

While the others, delighted to find that Louise was really able to celebrate her Christmas by discarding her crutch, were helping her into the house, Doctor Ward asked Will to hop into the old sleigh and drive around to the barn with them.

"Humph! That's funny!" exclaimed Madge. "I'd just like to know what they took him out there for!"

But by the time the men came back from the stable, dinner was being placed on the table—a real, old-time Southern hospitable one—and everything else was for the moment forgotten.

Elizabeth climbed up on her dictionary unaided, and coaxed to have Will sit between her and Dee Dee. Louise, seated the other side of Doris, was squeezing her friendly hand, while Doctor Ward was asking the blessing, trying to

tell her in this way how much they all rejoiced that her long years of invalidism were surely coming to a close.

A sizzling brown goose graced each end of the table, and a little roast pig, with an apple in his mouth, was before Doctor Ward. The new Christmas lowboy, temporarily pressed into service as a sideboard, was topped with a great pink ham with cloves stuck all over its crisp crust, and with apples and oranges, cracked nuts, raisins, and figs, and an iced fruit cake that was a masterpiece. "Oh, my! Oh, my!" laughed Doctor Ward appreciatively, "Dicey certainly has surpassed Dicey this time!" And he beamed upon the proud old cook, who was filling the twins' porringers with their holiday fare.

"Oh, goody, goody! Gravy with oysters in it!"

"And chestnut stuffing for goosey-goosey gander, hooray!"

"Look at the red, shivery bunnies, Louise." And Will pointed to the cranberry jelly that had been turned out of rabbit molds.

"And see the great sheafs of celery in the tall celery glasses! My piece is 'most a yard long!"

"It makth lovely curly thtrings!" cried little Whiz, pulling hers into long shreds.

"Eat all you-all wants," beamed Dicey. "The cook allus feels like you really liked her cooking when you leaves nuthing but naked bones for Lord

John Manners; and I'se got my medicine jar o' gizzard peelings ready for all as has any grumblin's of dyspepsy."

"Now for the dessert!" exclaimed Polly half an hour later.

"Oh" groaned Madge, "I wish I hadn't eaten so much of the regulars! I choose to light the plum pudding!"

Doris and Shirley had meanwhile been quietly removing the plates, and Dicey was pouring the sauce around the freckled, holly-sprigged pudding.

"No," said Mother, "Ramona must light it to-day because she is our guest from over the sea. We want to show her some of our old Christmas customs, too."

"It's great fun pulling the raisins from the flaming sauce! Let me show you how Ramona." And Doris laughingly initiated her cousin into the mysteries of securing a prize without burning the fingers.

"Hi, I've got one!" And Shirley popped her hot fingers into her mouth. "Please, can't I just suck off the burn, Mother?" in answer to Mrs. Deane's reproving glance. "No wonder little Jack Horner said, 'What a great boy am I!'"

"I've fished out three!" And Polly displayed them proudly.

"Oh, there never was such a lovely dinner!"

sighed Madge ecstatically. "It even beats—why it even beats the blessed Cratchity dinner! But—I'm so full of goodities and happiness, I haven't even a chink for anything more!"

"Not even room for a nice juicy piece of news? Ah—I thought that would wake our little reporter up!" said Doctor Ward. "We men have a scoop for you. You tell them, William."

But Will, who had flushed deeply when Doctor Ward turned all eyes toward him, seemed to half choke, and then, with a smile that got the best of a threatened tear, said shakily, "No, you tell them, sir."

"Of course," quickly acceded the kindly old professor.

"Well, children, it has taken us, Mr. Deane and my son and me, several weeks to look up the records about the ownership of the property next door with the three great elm trees in front that you call, I believe, the 'Three Bears.' I suspected long ago that the place rightfully belonged to William who would have inherited it from his mother; but, as you know, I was absorbed in finishing my book, didn't get around to looking into it as quickly as I had hoped, and so didn't say anything to him that might lead to disappointment in the end. Then William's illness after saving Louise from the fire delayed us a little, too. We didn't want the woman who made him call her

'aunt' to suspect anything before we served the papers on her to-day. So, as Doctor Brandon thought him entirely well again, we sent him out home last night for supper. Did you get out in time, William?"

"I got home in plenty of time, sir, but I didn't get any supper. She said that she had had hers, and not expecting me, hadn't saved any. She seemed very much put out at my coming back and interrupting her packing."

"Didn't you have a thing to eat last night?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I ate that saucer pie Dee Dee gave me when I left here after the sing."

"And breakfast?"

"Well," and Will squirmed away from Dicey's accusing glance, "there wasn't a thing in the house to eat, not a crumb. She had cleared out while I was asleep. I found this note on the kitchen table saying that she had married a lumberjack going South, and as I didn't need her to take care of me any more, she reckoned she'd never come back. I went out into the barn and found she had sold the cow, the pig, and the chickens. Even old Snitch was gone. I always thought she only kept that dog to scare people off!"

"She must have got wind of our looking up the records at the Court House," said Doctor Ward. "She knew well enough that the property should go to you, William; but she tried to bluff it out

that she inherited it from your aunt's husband whom she frightened into marrying her during his last illness. So William is now," looking genially around on the interested listeners, "the undisputed owner of the 'House of the Three Bears.' "

The Deanes were congratulating Will when Louise unexpectedly picked up the story thread.

"There's more yet! Doctor Brandon has a wonderful plan for Will, but I'm only going to tell our part. Will is so wonderfully good and strong in helping me around, that we have coaxed him to go home with us to-morrow and enter the Academy of which Grandpa used to be president, and study music with a famous master in our city.

"More yet! I haven't finished yet." And she laughingly warded off the questions that the children were eager to pelt her with. "If Will comes to stay in our house this winter and spring, we're coming, with Mrs. Mudge, to stay in his house with him next summer. Isn't that an elegant plan? The 'House of the Three Bears' has great possibilities, and is really a picturesque old place! And now that its evil spirit has taken herself off, we're going to fix it up and make it as lovely and homey as yours is. From it, you can see the river, right through the 'Well Sweep' trees, and I am glad that our rickety old house burned down.

"More yet!" And she held off the chorus long

enough to add, "And while we are staying at Will's, Grandpa and I are going to oversee the building of our little Indian bungalow at the far side of the old well; but we'll never shut off your view again."

That was a long speech for Louise whose happiness for once got the better of her shyness. "So, you see," she concluded triumphantly, "we'll all be together again next summer!" And she gave Doris, her inseparable chum, a rousing good hug.

"But we don't know whether we'll be here next year!" chorused the Deanelets. "We came to try camping out here only six months. Perhaps we'll have to go back to the city!"

"Let's go into the living room and talk over the pros and cons around the wood fire," suggested Father.

But it was a full half hour before they got back to the vital question. For, in their excitement over Doctor Ward's and Louise's news budget, they had forgotten about the Joke Stocking that always capped their Christmas feast. There it hung from the chandelier, a gorgeous red flannel one, especially made for the occasion and huge enough to fit the wearer of the Seven League Boots! Sleighbells jingled from toe and heel. A gigantic gingerbread goblin with raisin eyes gazed out from its top—the biggest red-and-white candy cane procurable jauntily crooked in his

arm—and bumps and bulges proclaimed that many nonsensical quips and quirks would soon be forthcoming from its cavernous interior.

This great stocking always served a double purpose in the Deane program. For Father and Mother often used it to teach the children to be good sports; that is, not to turn the tables unkindly on others, and to take it all as a joke when the tables happened to be turned upon them. To present Shirley, for instance, the one who was such an incorrigible tease yet took with such bad grace all retaliatory teasing, with a Joke Stocking jar of salve to heal the wounds inflicted by her sharp tongue brought far better results than a year of “dont’s.”

Madge accepted good-humoredly from Shirley a tiny toy donkey around whose neck was the tag, “said a little voice.” Polly was most enthusiastic over her little red dictionary inscribed “More polysyllables for Polly, the child after Doctor Johnson’s own heart, with the compliment of the great lexicographer.” Father rejoiced in the box of pencils donated by his children, who felt guilty about having often forgotten to return those that he was always lending them. From Madge, whose thumping “love pats” and whirlwind smacks were resented by her fastidious older sister, Shirley received a squishy confectioner’s kiss. There were a box of biscuit bones for dear old

Brownie-dog and a cherry-colored ribbon for Lady Teaser. A bow of the same ribbon adorned a fuzzy black *gato* sitting on a penwiper, a gift from the Happy-go-luckies to the reformed Ramona. Dicey chuckled over the toy quacking duck that was to console her till her beloved brood of ducklings should hatch in the spring. And Madge dimpled with confusion at receiving an honor flag for having held the head of her class for the past three weeks.

After the stocking was emptied, Mr. Deane said: "And now comes the Great Decision! We'll use the big stocking for a ballot box. Mother has the slips of paper ready. Dee Dee will pass them around with my precious new box of pencils that, after this, is never to be borrowed. If you vote to go, put a 'G' on your slip of paper. If you vote to stay, put an 'S'; and drop your vote into the stocking when Dee Dee comes around with it. Doctor Ward, Will, and Louise will be the tellers and announce the result."

While Mr. Deane was speaking Doctor Ward was fumbling through the pockets of his best coat trying to find an old envelope on which to keep the voting tally. Absent-mindedly drawing out a yellow envelope stamped with big black letters, he looked at it for a moment in a puzzled way and then handed it apologetically to Mr. Deane.

"I do hope that I have not delayed some important message," he said anxiously. "They gave it to me last evening at the Telegraph Office when I was sending a dispatch to my son about William."

As telegrams usually meant important news, a hush of expectancy fell upon the room as Mr. Deane hastily tore open the wrapper and read the message. Twice he read it, scarcely able to believe it. Then he read it aloud to the waiting room:

"CITY HOSPITAL WISHES TO BUY ENTIRE BLOCK FOR NEW BUILDING. WILL YOU SELL YOUR HOUSE"

"That settles it, doesn't it, Father?" asked Mrs. Deane.

"The sale would certainly give me more than enough to fix up this old place," replied her husband, still in a daze.

"Then you won't need what the H. S. H. League has earned to help keep Tuckaway House!" exclaimed Madge. "And after I earned the Toby jar, too!"

"Oh, that was the 'noble cause' you were working for, was it?"

"But, children dear," said Mother in dismay, "you surely were not planning to take other people's money to help our family out? We have let

you earn money in the family for family gifts and, sometimes, in the church for some public charity, but never for a private matter."

"But we wanted to stay here so much," explained the crestfallen Madge, "and we thought it was such a noble cause and——"

"You meant well, I'm sure," interrupted Mr. Deane kindly, "and your efforts will not be wasted; for we'll give the sum to make happy some family not so fortunate as ours. Madge may keep the Toby jar, if Dicey is willing. But after this you must all agree not to borrow, lend, or take money without first consulting us." Then, as the anxious little faces brightened again, "On New Year's Day we'll decide on the way in which your earnings can give the most happiness; but now we'll go on with the vote. Take up the ballots, Doris, please."

After a few breathless minutes Doctor Ward announced: "There were eight ballots cast, and the 'S's' on every one make the vote unanimous that you stay."

"I'm so glad!" exulted Doris. "This is the homiest home we ever had."

"And I love the togetherness of it," shrilled Madge's jubilant crescendo.

"Hooray, Hooray!
We're going to stay!"

And Shirley whirled the protesting Dicey breathlessly around the room.

"How about it, Dicey? Are you surprised?"

"No, Marse Jawge, I can't say as I is," answered the candid cook respectfully.

Mother looked affectionately at her faithful old mammy and asked,

"But are you *glad* to stay, Dicey?"

" 'Deed I is, Miss Doris!" The strong old face lighted up with the devotion of nearly forty years, and the voice shook a little as she repeated earnestly: " 'Deed I *is*! It's jest as the Good Book says, 'To them as casts *home*-made bread on the waters, it shall come back fruit cake every time.' "

THE END

